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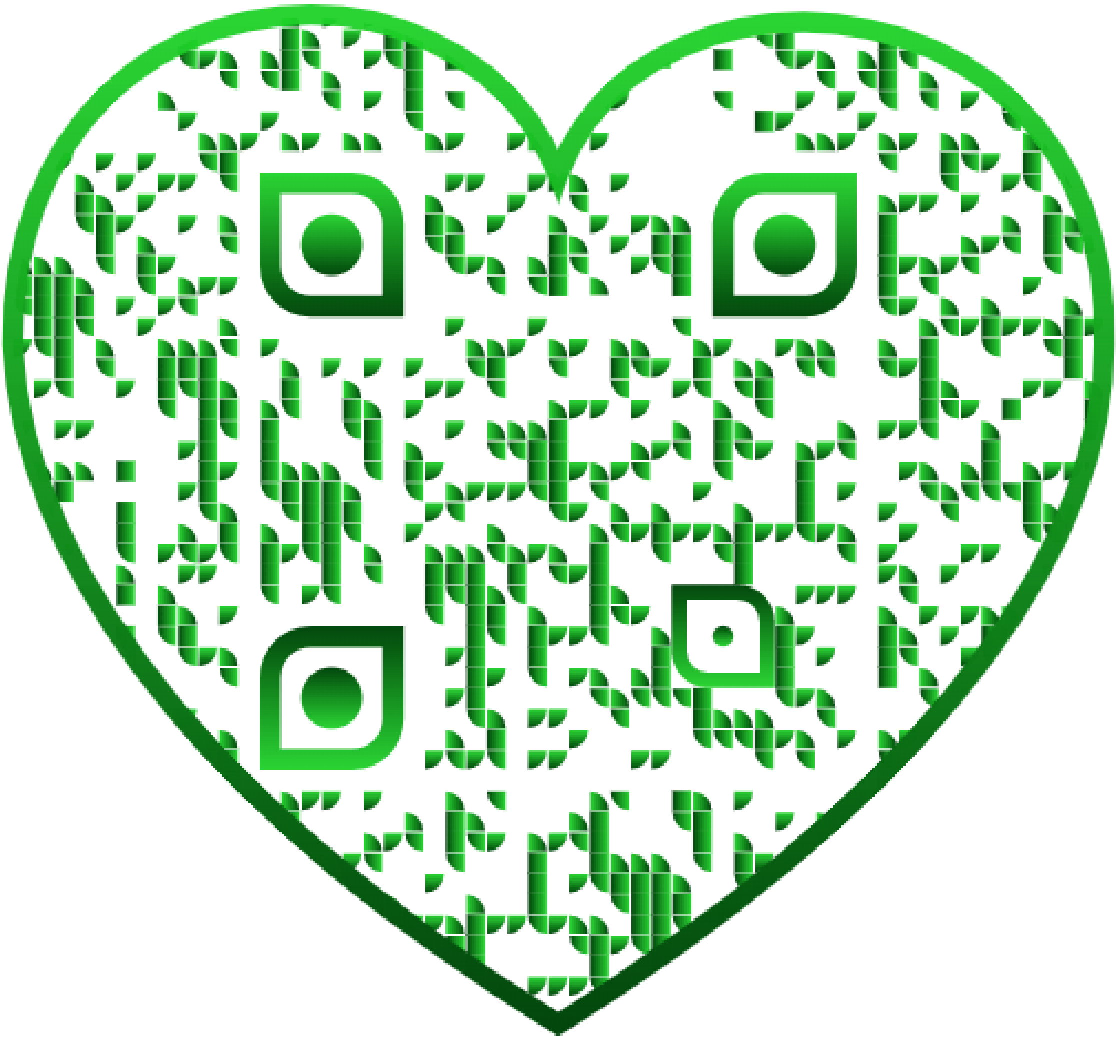
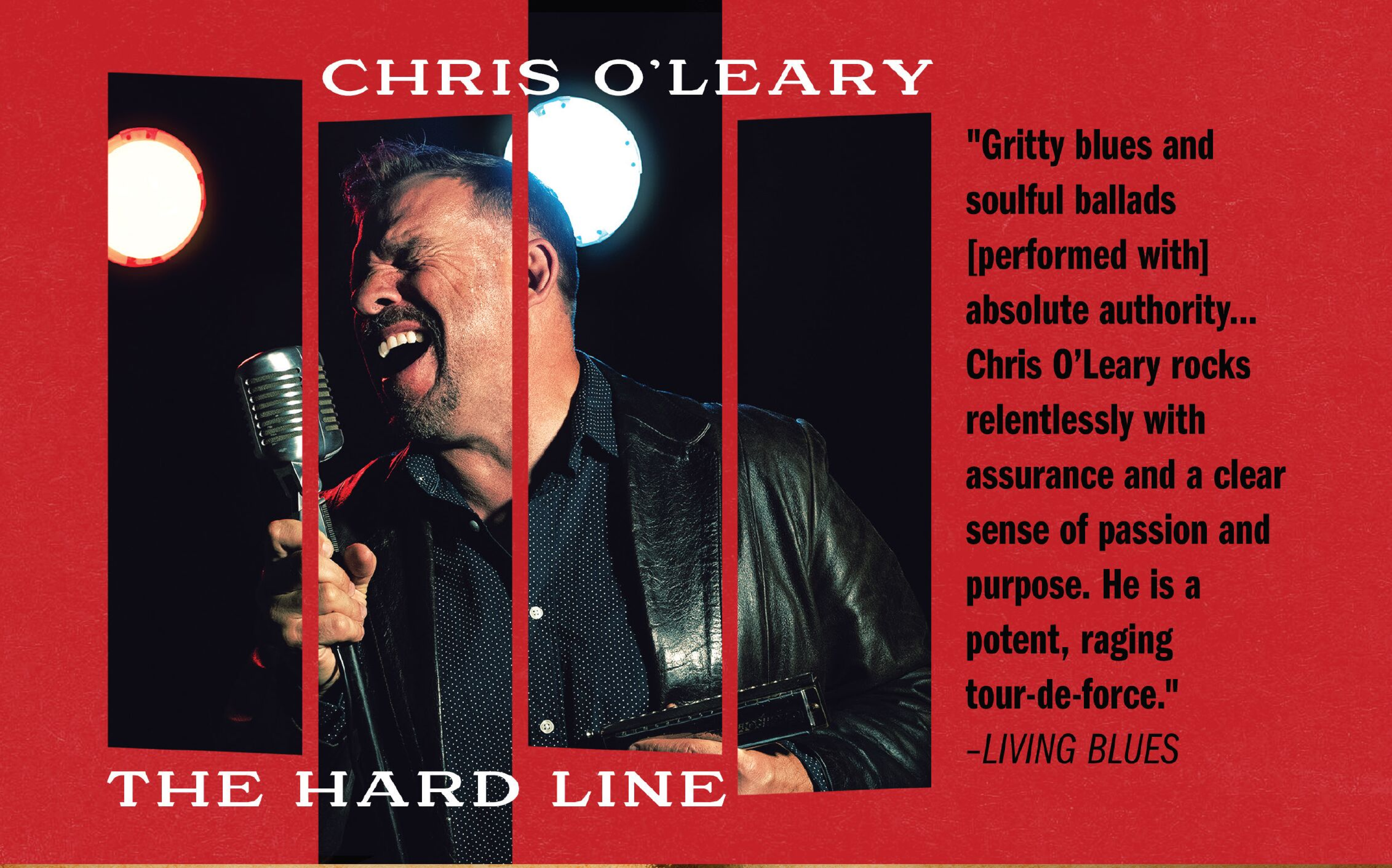
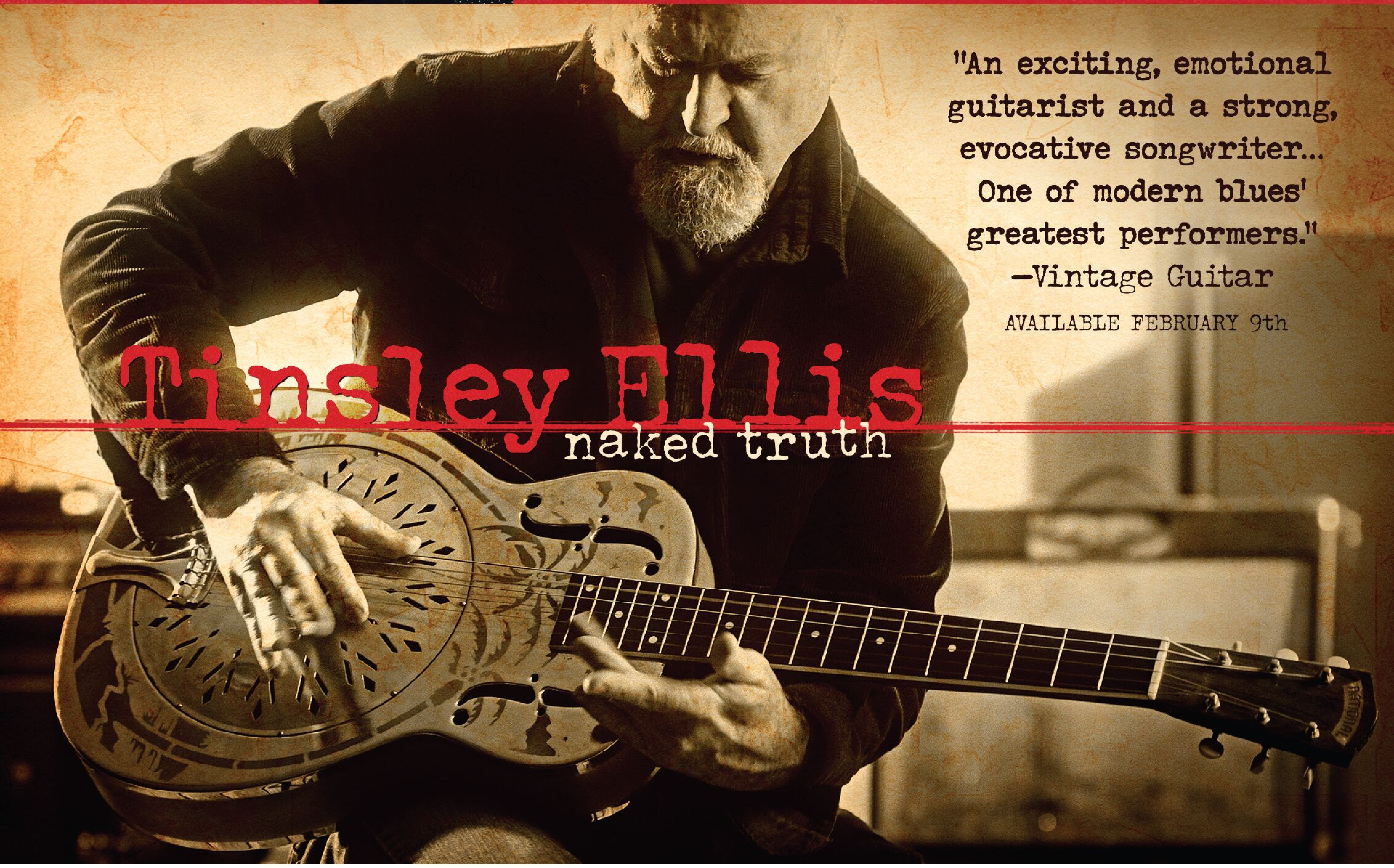
EMMA WILSON
"OFF I WENT ON A JET PLANE INTO THE UNKNOWN"







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PO Box 4820, STOKE ON TRENT, ST3 4PU

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF/OWNER:
Iain Patience:
editor@bluesmatters.com

ALBUM REVIEW EDITOR/OWNER:
Stephen Harrison:
reviews@bluesmatters.com

ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES:
ads@bluesmatters.com

DESIGN & WEBSITE MANAGER:
design@bluesmatters.com

Subscription Blues Matters:
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Cover image by
JOHN LANGFORD

Contributing Writers:

John Angus
Roy Bainton
Adrian Blacklee
Colin Campbell
Laura Carbone
Norman Darwen
Paul Davies
Dave Drury
Stephen Harrison
Barry Hopwood
Andy Hughes
Rowland Jones
Adam Kennedy
Jean Knappitt
Brian Kramer
Ben McNair
John Mitchell
David Osler
Iain Patience
Glenn Sargeant
Graeme Scott
Andy Snipper
Dani Wilde
Steve Yourglivch

Contributing Photographers:

Arnie Goodman
Adam Kennedy
Laura Carbone
Rob Blackham
plus others credited on page.

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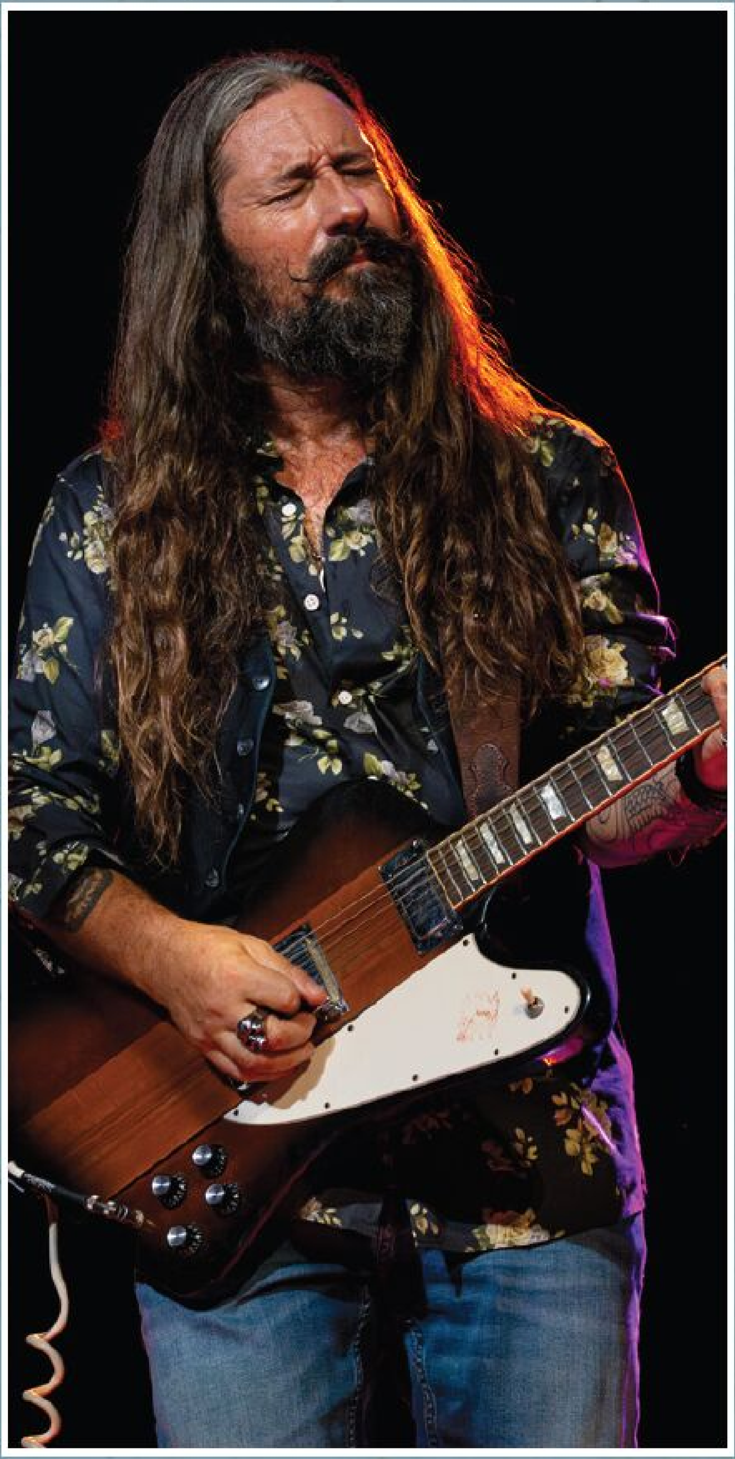

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THE ILLUSTRATED BLUES OF BRIAN KRAMER

ROBERT "JUNIOR" LOCKWOOD

One of the all-time great Delta Bluesman, that was certainly not boxed in by the Blues and was a free-stylin' jazz emulator as well, mixing and dipping in and out, weaving through both was the incredible pioneer, Robert Jr Lockwood.

In the 40s as a young man, Lockwood's mother was involved with Robert Johnson and is the only musician to have learned guitar and Blues directly from Johnson when he was in his early teens.

He inverted the "Junior" following his first name in tribute of his iconic step-dad. At 16 years old he teamed up with Sonny Boy Williamson and both performed regularly on the King Biscuit Time Radio Show, Helena's KFFA radio. The first to perform amplified Blues on the radio.

It did become a bit of a frustrating stigma later on which Lockwood began to tire of, being referred to Robert Johnson constantly, but with that said, it's as close as many of us ever got to a sense of the reality of Johnson other that the myth. It felt like Johnson's spirit was attached to Lockwood's essence and back in the 80's, that was something to behold.

Lockwood's choice instrument was an electric semi-hollow body 12 string guitar, giving him a huge chordal sound, very unique voicings and a distinctive style with his guitar playing.

One of the great, stand-out pairings was when Lockwood teamed up with another Delta icon & also Robert Johnson's traveling partner, Johnny Shines with the release of a series of albums together, receiving a Grammy and touring.

I was very privileged to see Lockwood perform live in New York a number of times, small up close and personal venues and took the opportunity to express my appreciation and shake his hand.

A personal favorite Lockwood song of mine is his easy going We're Gonna Ball Tonight.

This is my recent tribute illustration to a pioneer player who never stopped growing. A humble, quiet spoken man who has paved the road for many and left an indelible mark in the world of Blues.

LAURA IS KEEPING THE BLUES ALIVE

Readers will recognise the name, Laura Carbone. One of our regular contributors, Laura delivers fabulous photographic cover of most of the major US festivals, tours, gigs and cruises for Blues Matters.

We are therefore absolutely delighted to learn that her wonderful in-depth blues knowledge and talent is to be honoured by the Blues Foundation in Memphis

Laura Carbone is an accomplished Plattsburgh, New York-based photographer known for her contributions to leading blues publications around the world. Her work spans regional publications in upstate New York, national platforms covering blues music, and international magazines across Europe. Through her lens, Carbone magnificently captures the essence of the blues, in the process, supporting, promoting, and expanding awareness of the genre. Beyond her photography skills, Carbone supports the blues community by wearing numerous other hats. As an event promoter, she brings regional, national, and international artists to upstate New York. Along with providing unique work opportunities for these artists, her events introduce blues to a region where its presence was previously non-existent.

Carbone goes the extra mile by organizing Blues in the School events, creating additional work for touring musicians, and actively supporting Kids Rock the Nation, a program that provides instruments and instruction to aspiring young music students. Moreover, Carbone demonstrates her commitment to the genre through generous acts of philanthropy. She contributes her photos to fundraisers, financially supports worthwhile causes, and frequently opens her home as a rehearsal space. Similarly, the popular house concerts she hosts provide an intimate setting for music enthusiasts.

Remarkably, Carbone engages in these charitable activities without seeking recognition or expecting any tangible rewards, showcasing a genuine dedication to the blues community. For all these reasons and more, The Blues Foundation is honoured to present Carbone with a 2024 Keeping the Blues Alive Award.

A LEGENDARY CRUISE OF BLUES

Anita Schlank   Laura Carbone

The Legendary Rhythm and Blues Cruise lives up to its name by showcasing a lineup of legendary artists, honoring the past, celebrating the present, and nurturing the future of the blues genre. On last October's cruise, the 39th sailing, there was an unparalleled line-up from Grammy recognized established legends, to the descendants of past legacy legends to emerging talents who are shaping the future of the Blues.

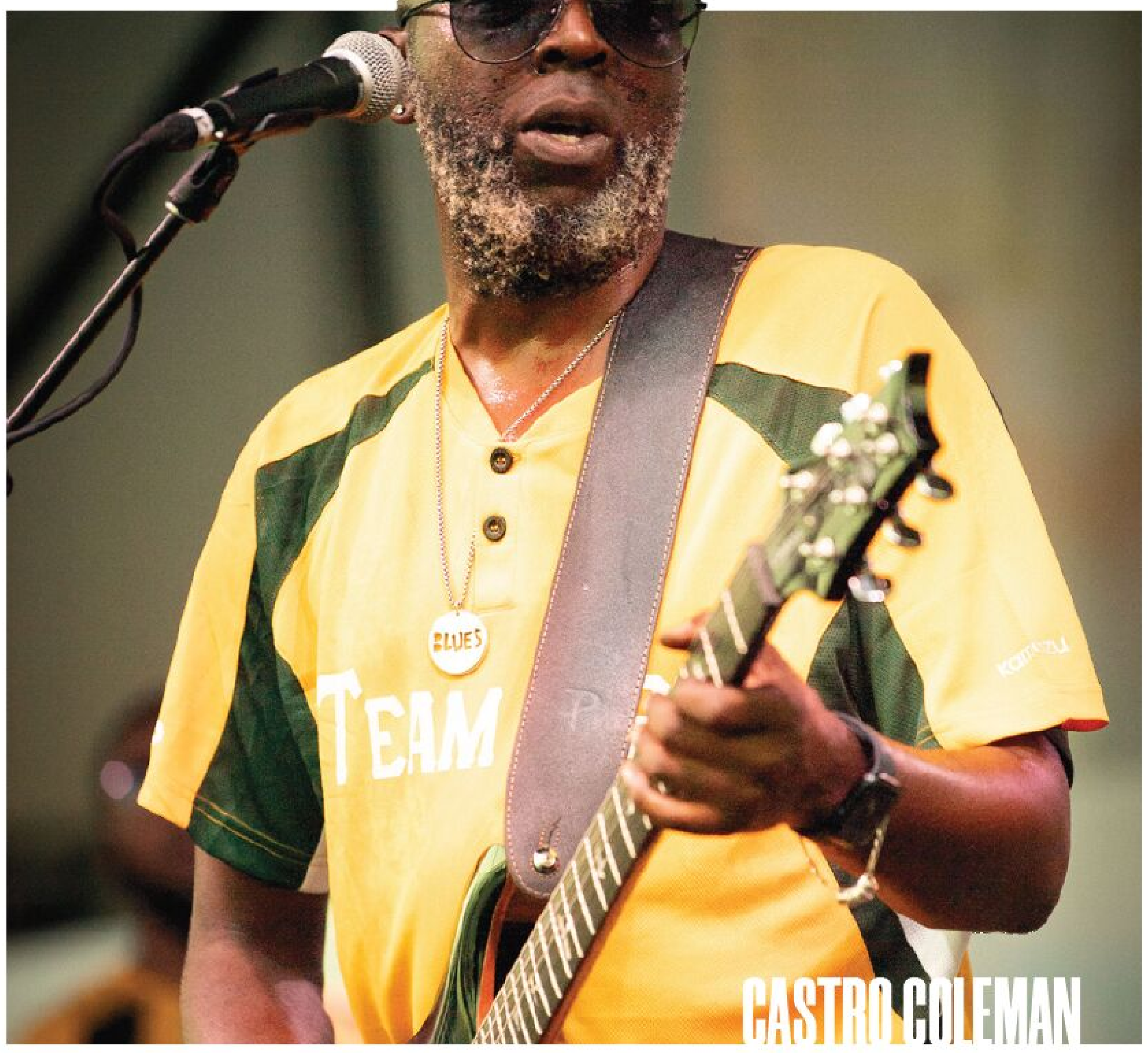
Current Legends: The last cruise featured icons that have multiple Grammy nods like this year's nominees Ruthie Foster and Mr, Sipp as well as past nominees and winners such as Christone "Kingfish" Ingram, Sugaray Rayford, Los Lobos, Elvin Bishop, Victor Wainwright and the Train, and the ever-present legend Taj Mahal this time backed by the Grammy-winning Phantom Blues Band. These artists, with their varied backgrounds and styles, from traditional to contemporary, provide a top notch and memorable experience for the audience.

Children of Legends: A unique aspect of this cruise is its tribute to past legends through their offspring, bringing legacy to life. The performances of Shemekia (daughter of Johnny Copeland), Ronnie (son of Lonnie Baker Brooks), and Bernard (son of Bernard Allison) are not just performances; they are a living, breathing continuation of the blues tradition passed down through generations.

Future Legends: The cruise also serves as a platform for emerging young artists who are redefining the Blues scene. Artists like Christone "Kingfish" Ingram, Dylan Triplett, Mack McDonald, Stephen Hull, DK Harrell, Mathias Lattin, Vanessa Collier, and Ben Levin are not just preserving the Blues legacy; they are actively reshaping it with their unique styles and talents.

The Legendary Rhythm and Blues Cruise is more than just a musical event; it's a celebration of the Blues, honoring its past, reveling in its present, and eagerly anticipating its future. It's a place where legends of yesterday, today, and tomorrow come together, offering a once-in-a-lifetime experience for Blues enthusiasts.

"KINGFISH" INGRAMS



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SHEMEKIA COPELAND

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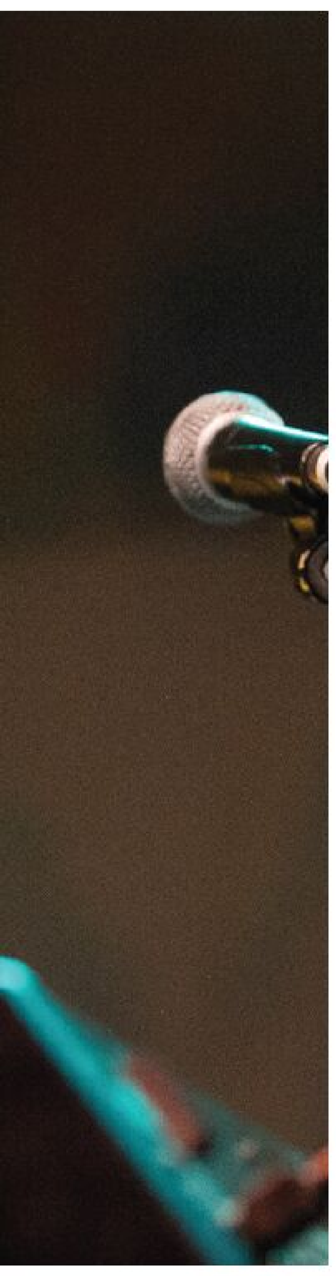

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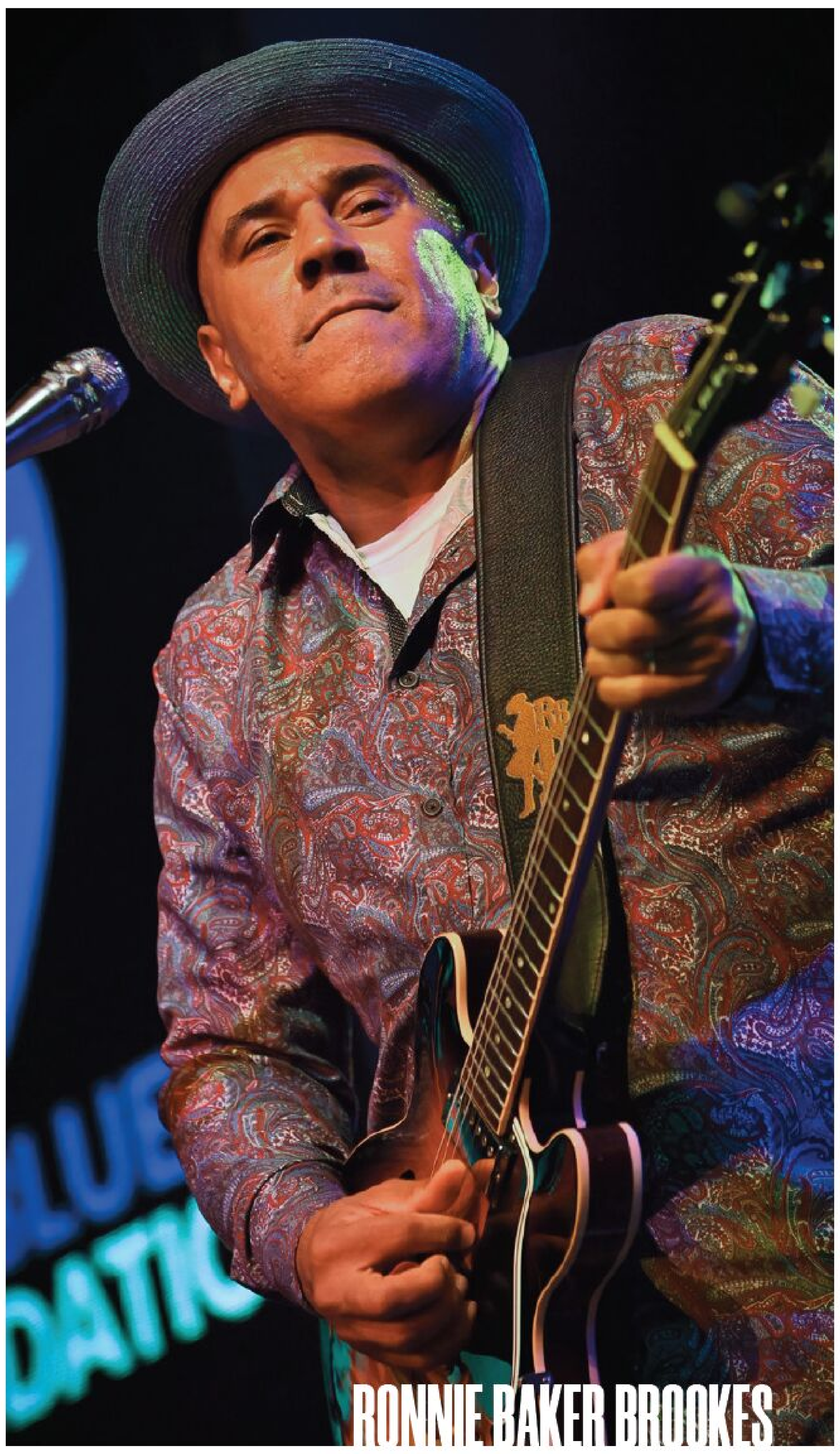

RONNIE BAKER BROOKES

HARMONIC HUES UNLEASHED: HARPIN' BY THE SEA 2024 SETS SAIL IN BRIGHTON

Harpin' By The Sea (HBTS) is back and ready to rock Brighton from February 2nd to 4th, 2024. Tickets are up for grabs, and trust us, you don't want to miss out on the harmonica party of the year!

This time around, HBTS is shaking things up. It's not just about nailing those harmonica notes; it's a full-blown journey into musical awesomeness. We're talking vocal skills, jam-ready repertoire, and even diving into the world of rack harmonica playing. Whether you're a newbie or a seasoned pro, there's something for everyone.

And can we talk about the Saturday night lineup? Brace yourselves for the killer combo of Mark Feltham and Dennis Greaves from the UK, the soulful vibes of Sweet Marta Suñé from Spain with The Blues Deluxe Band, and the one and only Eddie Martin from the UK. Oh, and did we mention the afternoon Q&A session with these legends? It's gonna be epic!

HBTS is all about breaking the mold. Forget what you know about harmonica festivals; we're here to blow your mind. Check out the agenda for HBTS 2024, and you'll see what we mean.

Quick heads up – this festival sells like hotcakes. Circle the dates, February 2nd-4th, 2024, and don't procrastinate on getting your tickets. Until January 1st, 2024, show tickets are exclusively for workshop attendees, so grab one for you and a buddy. After January 2nd, any leftovers go public, so be on the lookout.

In the spirit of good vibes and killer tunes, the message is simple: Show up, feel the music, and spread the word to your crew. Harpin' By The Sea 2024 is bringing the harmonica love to Brighton – don't miss the groove!

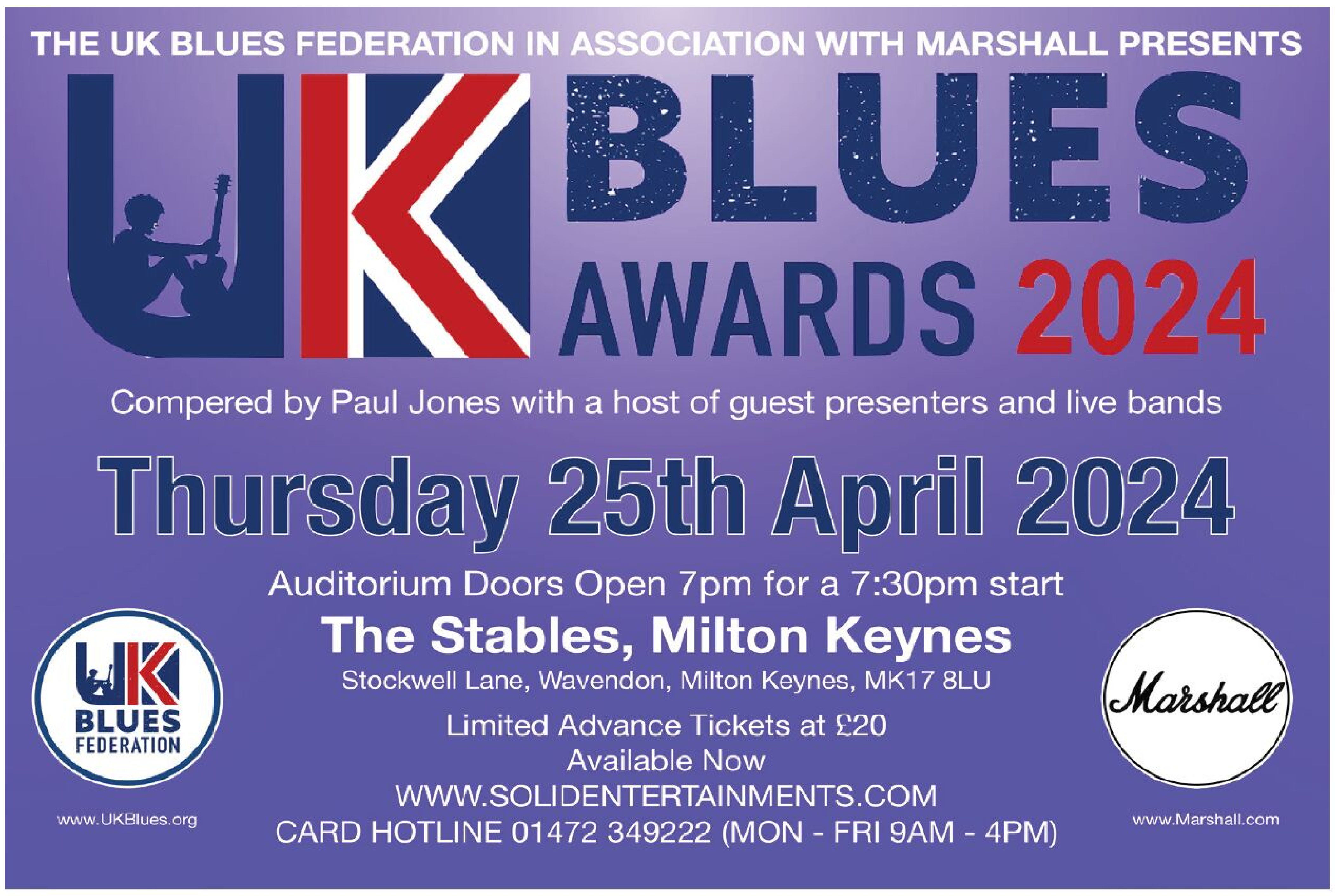
UK BLUES AWARDS GEARING UP FOR 2024 CEREMONY

Each year The UK Blues Federation runs The UK Blues Awards. This isn't to determine who is best at anything - rather it's to give some recognition to those who made an impact during the preceding year. That's why all the Awards are called 'The... of the Year'

So how does it all work? At the beginning of the year The UK Blues Federation asked a panel of over 1,500 individuals from across the Blues spectrum in the UK for their nominations for The UK Blues Awards. In record numbers , between 8th and 20th January, those nominations flooded in. Each individual was asked to make three nominations in order of preference in each of eleven categories. Their first choice was given three points, their second two and their third one. All those points were tallied up to give a top twenty in each category announced on 28th January and the top five will then be announced on 4th February. That top five will be called the Finalists and the public will be asked to vote for who they believe deserves the Award. That will start on 10th and run through until 24th and the winners of the Awards will then be announced at a lavish Awards night on 25th April.

After last year's UK Blues Awards sold out, The UK Blues Federation have taken the whole night up a notch. This year it will be held in The Jim Marshall Auditorium at The Stables in Milton Keynes. With easy access from all over the UK, plentiful local accommodation and every facility imaginable it's the perfect choice for this prestigious night.

Once again Paul Jones will be the compere for the evening and, as well as the announcements of the Awards themselves made by well known names there'll also be live music from bands and artists who are yet to be announced. For those lucky ones with tickets it'll certainly be a memorable night! Those tickets are already flying out so to get yours head to https://www.ukblues.org and book yourself in for a great night out



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STEVE HARRISON'S

RECORD ROUND-UP

LED ZEPPELIN

THE FIRST STEP ON MY ROAD THROUGH THE BLUES

When you hear me start chatting about Led Zeppelin, you could be forgiven for asking, why is he prattling on about a rock band or a heavy rock band as we used to call them back in the day. People seem to forget that Led Zeppelin's music is firmly rooted in the Blues, as much as, or even more so, than The Rolling Stones.

My first encounter with Led Zeppelin came around 1973-74, if memory serves me correctly. I'd been through the glam-rock vibe and started to feel my way through more grown-up stuff. At around this time, me and my best friend were in his house, he had an older sister, who'd got the early Rod Stewart albums, Every Picture Tells A Story, An Old Raincoat, Jeff Beck Group, and she happened to have a copy of Led Zeppelin 2. Now you can call this a simple twist of fate if you like, I was aware of Led Zeppelin, and it was like being drawn by a magnet to this album, I had to listen to it. If his sister had been in the house at the time, she'd never let us play her albums, but, like I say, a simple twist of fate, from the moment of Side (1) Track(1) Whole Lotta Love, my musical life changed forever, my first tentative steps on the Blues journey had begun.

So, I'd heard and been captivated by the first bars of Led Zeppelin 2. I immediately knew that this was much more than Rock music, there was something deeper pulling me closer, of course, there wasn't anything like the internet, or Google to look up, or research with, we had to rely on music papers such as New Musical Express, Sounds, or Rolling Stone magazine. It's funny, but I knew from that moment that Zeppelin was rooted elsewhere, and I made it my goal to explore as much as possible.

So, Led Zeppelin 2. Now the opening track is, of course, Whole Lotta Love, but this is based around the lyrics written by Willie Dixon," You Need Love", as Robert sings with so much passion during the song. You Need Love was originally recorded by Muddy Waters in 1962, so we can see the Blues pattern emerging from the very first track. The Lemon Song has so many references to a few songs originally written and performed by Robert Johnson. Bring It On Home (Dixon) was another song that had been recorded in 1963 by Sonny Boy Williamson, wherein lies another story. Apparently, Robert had gone to see Sonny Boy performing in Birmingham, before he joined Zeppelin, around 1966-67. As Robert walked past his dressing room, he noticed one of Sonny Boys' Harmonicas on the table, suffice it to say that it found its way into Roberts's possession, and he played that Harmonica on Bring It On Home, and used it during many live performances. So the Blues, quite simply are the foundation of the music of Led Zeppelin.

The first Zeppelin album, I discovered a couple of months later (wrong way round I know) and I immersed myself fully into it having had the pleasure of Led Zeppelin 2. On the first album, there are another two Blues classics written by Willie Dixon, " You Shook Me" co-written with J.B. Lenoir and sung once again by Muddy Waters in 1962. The other tune " I Can't Quit You Baby" was originally recorded by Otis Ruch in 1956. So the first two albums released by Led Zeppelin were hugely reliant on the Blues, and this was not the end of it by any stretch of the imagination.

The Four Symbols album, or Untitled, or Zep 4, whatever you want to call it, also contained more than a nod and a wink to the Blues in the form of, When The Levee Breaks. Now this song was originally written in 1929 by Memphis Minnie. It tells the tale of the Levees breaking along the Mississippi in 1927 causing huge floods and total devastation for miles around. A Blues tune telling a real story, this has to be the best of them. Although Memphis Minnie wrote and played guitar on the song, it was in fact, Kansas Joe McCoy who provided the vocals. It was thought that he was better suited at the time. And on a Box Set Super Deluxe release, The B.B.C. Sessions, Zeppelin performed a live version of Robert Johnson's Travelling Riverside Blues, with excerpts from, Crossroad Blues, Kind Hearted Woman, and Come On In My Kitchen. Led Zeppelin is as rooted in the Blues as anyone, they showed me the path to take in my pursuit of Blues knowledge.

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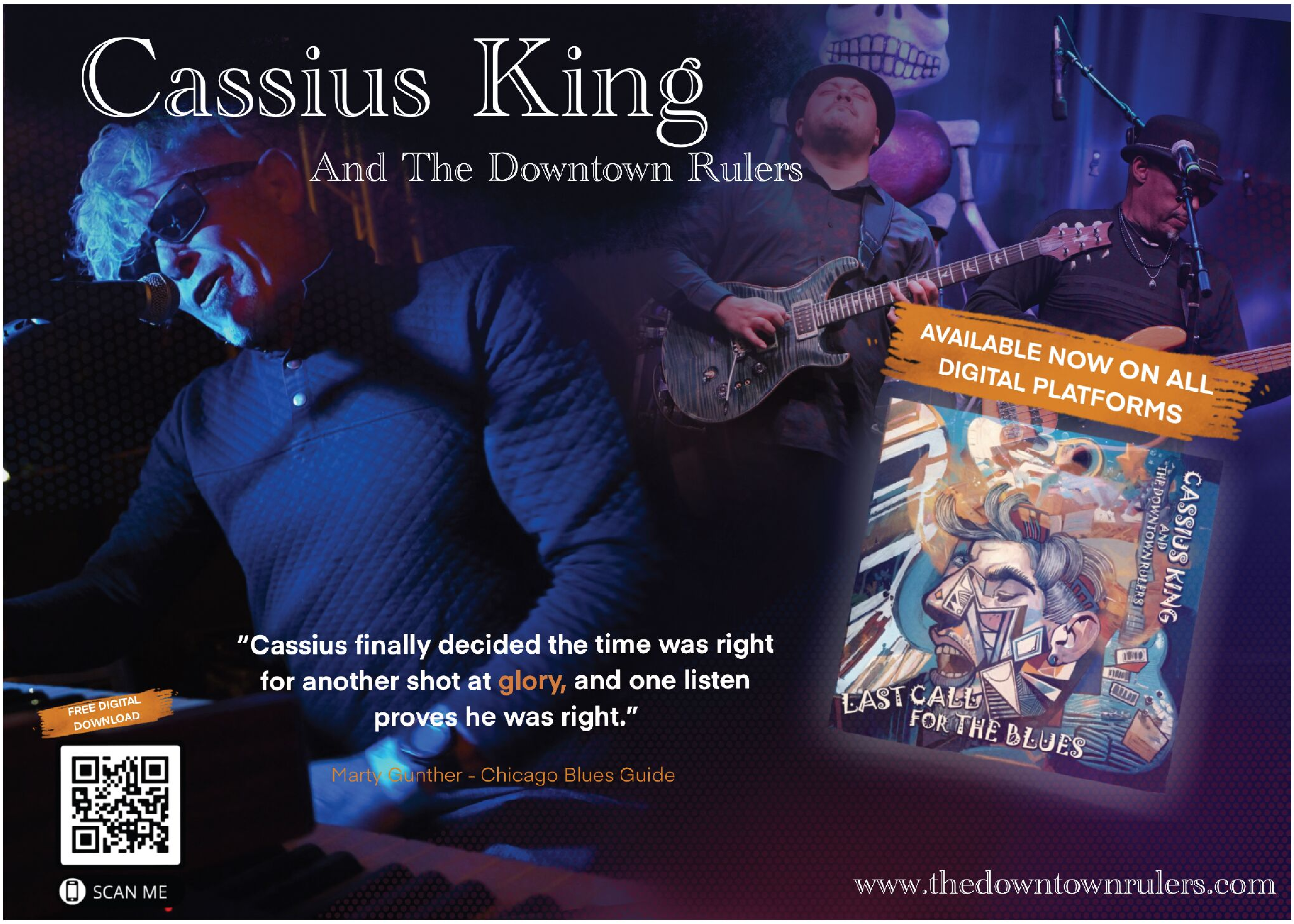
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THE BIG EASY CRUISE – NOVEMBER 2023

Anita Schlank   Marilyn Stringer

There are many music-themed cruises from which to choose, but last November a new cruise was launched which celebrated the unique music and vibrant culture of New Orleans. Leaving from Fort Lauderdale and stopping next for a full day in New Orleans, Star Vista partnered with Bender Presents (organizer of The Big Blues Bender) to offer The Big Easy Cruise. The Soul Queen of New Orleans, Irma Thomas, was a natural choice for a headliner, and she demonstrated that at 82 years of age, she has not lost any power or range to her vocals, and still exudes her famous warmth and charm. While technically residing about an hour away from New Orleans, Cajun bluesman, Tab Benoit, was also a favorite among the guests.

A celebration of New Orleans might seem incomplete without Jon Cleary & the Absolute Monster Gentlemen and the Dirty Dozen Brass Band, but luckily, they were on board, as well as New Orleans-based bands Tuba Skinny, The Tin Men, Cha Wa, and Rockin' Dopsie Jr & the Zydeco Twisters. Additionally, Anders Osborne, Joe Krown, and multi-instrumentalist Johnny Sansone, who have all made New Orleans their home for many years, joined the party, as well as some favorite non-Louisiana-based artists, like Mike Zito, Jimmy Hall, Samantha Fish, and Jesse Dayton, just to name a few.

The Bender Brass Band, led by Jimmy Carpenter, is famous for their remarkable ability to learn hundreds of songs and expertly back-up artists with little- to-no time to rehearse. They did not disappoint, as their work on the Big Easy Cruise was just as impressive as they have always been when performing at the Big Blues Bender.

After docking in New Orleans, guests had the option to attend an excellent performance by Galactica (featuring Anjelika "Jelly" Joseph) at the famous venue, Tipitina's. Guests then raced back to the ship to catch a special show by the Tedeschi-Trucks Band. Passengers had several hours the following day to wander off the ship and search for beignets and coffee with chicory, before brushing off the powdered sugar and heading back to set sail for Cozumel, Mexico.

Many non-concert events were also available on board, including intriguing interviews with Tab Benoit, Samantha Fish, Anders Osborne, and members of Little Feat and the Dirty Dozen Brass Band. Additionally, Chef Kevin Belton offered his wisdom about cooking and about life.

New Orleans is home to one of the most vibrant and enduring burlesque scenes, and Minx Burlesque was somewhat of a surprise addition to the lineup, as they demonstrated the "art of the tease," pairing with the Bender Brass Band. As word spread around the ship about these talented and beautiful women, their shows became packed, including being attended by many of the musicians on board.

The overall atmosphere of The Big Easy Cruise was extremely relaxed, and there were numerous opportunities to interact socially with the talented artists featured in the line-up. Odds are the second Big Easy Cruise, scheduled for January 2025, will be just as successful.

You can check out the new line-up at www.bigeasycruise.com

TAB BENOIT

JIMMY CARPENTER

DWAYNE DOPSIE

TUBA SKINNY

SENSATIONAL ALEX HARVEY EXPERIENCE

The Sensational Alex Harvey Experience (SAHE) are the UK's No 1 tribute to the 70s Scottish Rock & Blues super group The Sensational Alex Harvey Band (SAHB). The original idea for a SAHB tribute was born from an invite to a charity event in 2013 and to include some SAHB numbers. The band were so well received it was decided to develop the idea.

Fast forward eleven years and the band has toured the UK extensively, building a reputation to become a favourite on the circuit. After a few line-up change,s the band is settled with Andy Massie on vocals, Brian Cartwright on Guitar, Chris Killen on drums, David Cowan on keys and Nelson McFarlane on bass. Anyone who has seen the band live and will know they deliver in a committed, professional manner. The band are first and foremost SAHB fans and work hard to keep the music alive for fans both old and new. Whilst the SAHB music is given a respectful nod, the band has both updated and developed the songs so they sound fresh and relevant.

The show includes recreations/versions of songs from well-loved albums such as NEXT, The Impossible Dream, Tomorrow Belongs to Me and many more. SAHE have received accolades like "My Dad would have approved" (Alex Harvey Jr), "The best SAHB since SAHB" (Chris Glen) and "the best SAHB tribute out there by far" (Zal Cleminson). In an interesting twist, two members of SAHE were also part of the short-lived Zal Cleminson's Sin Dogs which released a critically-acclaimed album (Vol. 1) in 2019 and toured the UK and Europe. Those two members (Cowan and McFarlane) have continued the Sin Dogs brand with new members, and Vol. 2 is scheduled for release later in 2024. Meanwhile, SAHE has also recorded and released licenced versions of SAHB classics such as Faith Healer, Midnight Moses and Isobel Goudie (amongst others) which are available for downloads/streaming on the usual platforms (Spotify/Apple/Amazon etc). This is an unusual and brave step for a tribute band but has been very well received by fans both old and new.

The band have performed in such places as The O2 ABC Glasgow, The Voodoo Rooms Edinburgh, Backstage at The Green Hotel, Kinross, and various major venues throughout the UK including Newcastle, Stoke, Sheffield, Derby. They are scheduled to appear at various venues in the North West of England and Wales in 24/25 and hope to make a first visit to Ireland in near future.. You can expect to hear all the best known SAHB favourites with a few surprises and rarities thrown in as well for the 'Super Fans.' The show also includes stage theatrics and humour of the original band. While SAHE is primarily a rock band, there is clear blues lineage in the material.

The Sensational Alex Harvey Experience will be the headline act at the opening night (19th January 2024) of the inaugural Tyneside Americana and Blues Festival at the Crescent Club in Cullercoats : so expect a Scots dimension to be included in the Festival.

JOHN GREGORY

John Gregory aka Blue John/the CountryBlyes Crusader, is a busy guy. With a foot in many blues-doors. Based on the Isle of Man, he also a very fine acoustic picker and explains his current position in this forthright way.

In 2013 I celebrated the 50th anniversary of the re-discovery of Mississippi John Hurt (exactly half a century to the day since this happened) by arranging for his biographer Dr Phil Ratcliffe to come to the Isle of Man for a sold out presentation about John Hurt and we also performed some of John's songs live at the event.

Dr Phil and I struck up a great friendship and played gigs together and in 2017 ; we organised a British Isles tour - and were the support act - for world-renowned country blues fingerpicker Ari Eisinger from Philadelphia. In 2018 I went to Chicago to play Big Bill Broonzy's 00028 1946 Martin guitar at the Old Town School of Folk Music. 2019, I organised a British Isles tour for - and was the opening act for - the Erin Harpe Country Blues Duo from Boston USA.

Also in 2019 I organised a British Isles tour - and was the opening act for - Toby Walker from New Jersey USA. This past weekend I brought him back to the Isle of Man after a UK tour organised by Derek White. I've opened for Nine Below Zero, the Fabulous Thunderbirds, jazz guitarist Martin Taylor and many others in the Isle of Man. Some of the support slots were with my friend Tim Cass - we started a blues duo together in 2007 - Blue John and Papa Cass - but mostly I perform solo these days.

I've also played country blues at the Bitter End in New York and in Austin, Texas. I also run the Country Blues Crusader Facebook and Instagram pages and am a full time guitar tutor teaching blues as well as rock, pop, country and folk. My music promotion business is called Blue John Media.

The title Country Blues Crusader came about as I named a CD I recorded (released on UK independent label Southern Summer Records) with that title. The title came about AFTER I asked Dr Phil to write the liner notes. Some of the support slots were with my friend Tim Cass - we started a blues duo together in 2007 - Blue John and Papa Cass - but mostly I perform solo these days. I've also played country blues at the Bitter End in New York and in Austin, Texas.

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BAZ FIELDS AND THE DEBT COLLECTORS ROCK'N'BLUES BAND

If you're in Glasgow you'll find a healthy pub music scene with a generous share of Rock and Blues acts. Since 2011 this includes 'The Debt Collectors Rock'n'Blues Band. Founded by lead guitarist/vocalist Baz Fields., who has been playing guitar for over 50 years, only taking up lead vocal duties in the past six or seven..

"Frankly, I was frustrated by the parade of lead vocalists who would come traipsing through the band leaving havoc in their wake. I have a theory about why vocalists can be the more difficult prima donna's in a band (closely followed by lead guitarists, I'll confess). Studies of brain activity as seen in CT and MRI scans show performing musicians' brain lighting up like a Xmas trees from all those fine motor movements, aural analysis, tempo, pitch , emotional interpretation etc. while a singer's brain ... well not quite so much.

So I'm thinking vocalists see us players getting the buzz well on and react 'Hey shouldn't I be feeling as good after all I'm the frontman !?"' And so, those of shallower character get moody and impossible to work with. So I bit the bullet and took over lead vocal duties having first 'paid my dues tae Rock'n'Blues.' with regular training from a proper vocals coach including months then years of diligent exercising.

It is said once you've put ten thousand hours into any discipline you finally get on top of it. Some folk are gifted enough to open their mouths and music comes out but I did it the hard way and had to find my voice. Now I really enjoy exploring vocals for many styles and genres. With the Debt Collectors we're focused on covering guitar driven Rock'n'Blues classics where I get to emulate my heroes such as Jimi Hendrix, Gary Moore, Peter Green , Jimmy Page and more. But I had another itch to scratch. I had written a handful of songs at various stages of completion so I used the Covid downtime to record a solo album, title of 'Long Time Coming" - not the most original title but an accurate description of my particular musical journey . I've never performed the album live so that's a goal for the future. Meanwhile the Debt Collectors have a full gig diary for 2024 regularly playing venues around Glasgow and Central Scotland.

"The Scotia Bar" for example is a Glasgow institution in terms of the performing arts with everything from poetry readings and folk jam nights to live bands, so we were most chuffed when the management team asked us to make our shows there a regular event. From now on, we'll be "pay'n our dues tae Rock'n'Blues" in regular monthly instalments there, on 1st monthly Saturday afternoons."

Photo: 'chillin with my all original 1973 Framus Jan Akerman; it too has paid its dues to rock'n'blues so now it's like a house-cat, stays home"

WOLVES AT THE DOOR

PHILIP SAYCE

Andy Hughes   Christopher Logan & Ian Potter

Blues troubadour Philip Sayce has worked through the nightmare of Covid, and turned some of his own personal issues into a fine collection of songs for his new album, The Wolves Are Coming. Philip spent an enjoyable day in balmy autumn Los Angeles, in the roof garden of his hotel, talking to journalists keen to hear about the new record, and Philip's approach to the blues. BM's Andy Hughes joined him for an in-depth conversation.

I start by asking how he"s doing generally before he moves to discuss the process behind the new release:

"Wonderful, I am so thankful and I feel very blessed to be able to talk to people about my music, so thanks for having me in Blues Matters Magazine, I really appreciate it."

"Spirit Rising was the last album I had that came out through Warner Music, and that came right out smack-bang in the middle of the pandemic. The album streamed really well, so we thought we would let that run its course. There was next to no promotion for the record, obviously we couldn't tour it, and by the time we were in a position to be able to do anything about the record, that was the back end of 2021, and going into 2022. So, at that time, I decided to go into the studio for two or three days at a time, and see about recording some of the songs I had written, and just see how that went. I did that through into April as well, book three days, record three songs, and then live with them, think about them, decide which ones were going to go forward, and which ones maybe not. I had to work it that way, three days and then a gap, because I had no income coming in, and of course, the cost of living went up after the pandemic, and hasn't gone down since, for everyone. It was a different way of working for me. Instead of booking into the studio for ten days and recording fourteen songs all in that time, I had these three-day stretches when I could take the music home with me and have a think about what worked and what didn't, and what to change and where I needed to re-write sections, and I finished the album with that new process."

He continues with the theme, explaining: "We thought about maybe releasing a series of EP's, and getting the material out that way, and there were conversations with a number of record companies, and they think, and discuss, and then they think some more, and that all takes months at a time. And finally we decided to release the album and it's coming out as you say, in February.'

"I think it will be the future for me. The concept of a standard album has changed, with the advent of streaming, people listen and consume music in a different way. So, when I put out an entire album of twelve songs, a few weeks later, people are asking me where the new music is! You have to feed the machine all the time. I say I just put out an entire album, but people still expect something new right away. It's almost like releasing music is like an Instagram post, people think it's going to come every few days. So, I do think that if I create a batch of two or three songs, and I do as I did with this album, and listen to them, and they feel right, and ready to go, I might just put them straight out, and let people have them and listen to them, while I work on some more."

With streaming and digital services now in the ascendency, I ask for his thoughts on this development. Sayce is quick to explain his own thoughts:

"I think it's good and bad to be honest with you. On the one hand, it's a good thing that people are able to get music from artists they like on a more regular basis, with less of a time gap in-between. But on the other hand, an album, a complete selection of songs, is a format that a huge number of people still know, and still love. For them, it's like having a complete novel instead of getting it a chapter at a time."

"I think songwriting is such a wonderful gift to have, it is a healing process. It's something that allows me to express, release, discover, and find out things about myself in the process. Quite often, it's not just about writing a song. Something can make you decide to try and work out the experience into a song, and maybe no-one is actually going to hear it when it's finished, you don't really know that at the time. But that's not the important, thing, it's about following the process through and seeing where it leads. That's where the songs on this album came from, to help me stay grounded, to stay buoyant, and hopeful, to stay alive during a very bleak time It's a bit like working in a laboratory, in this corner you have something that's not working, but over there is something that is growing and developing. And sometimes things that don't work lead you into something else that does."

"We all have things that are our favourite things, it doesn't matter if its listening to bird songs, or baking cookies, or going running, I want everyone to do something that gives you pleasure. For me, I'm lucky enough that it's music, and I can put my feelings out there."

Having turned his hand to both guitar and bass on the new album, I 'm curious about why he handled bass himself this time:

"It's really about practicality. I don't like a whole bunch of people wandering in and out of the studio when I'm working. So, I had Michael Leasure the drummer who plays with Walter Trout's band. He would come in and we would work out some material with just drums and guitar, and when he went home, I would overdub the bass guitar, and maybe add some guitar solos or extra guitar and vocal parts, just me and the engineer, which is the way I like to work in the studio. There are also the practicalities of the end of Covid, and not bringing a lot of people into the enclosed space of a studio, so that was a consideration as well at that time."

Sayce has a touring band that is amazing, featuring a drummer from Roger Hodgson's band, and also Foreigner, and normally a bassist from Agent Orange, and they've both played with Dick Dale, I suggest they must really be able to tear it up on stage with those guys!:

"Those guys are wonderful on stage, and they are wonderful off stage as well. They are great to hang out with, and they are super-talented

musicians, and we just have a ball when we go out on tour. They tear it up like no-one's business! I feel that they make me a better musician. The feel and power they bring in, they make a well-oiled machine, and they've played with Dick Dale, so they are not afraid of loud guitars!"

In the past, Sayce worked with Jeff Healey, so when I mention it, he responds warmly:

"Jeff was a very nurturing guy. He took me under his wing when I was a young player just starting out, and he did that for a number of players. He invited me to be part of his band for a few years, when I started, I was just finishing high school, and I stayed through my early twenties with him. I can't express enough how much of a gamechanger it was to play and study with him. I went to the university of Jeff Healey and I got to watch him play his ass off every night all over the world. He would let me solo, and lead the band for a few songs, and he was so great, so special

And he confirms he would be prepared to consider a young beginner now he's out on his own feet: "If I found a player I admired and gelled with musically, I would think about bringing them along if the logistics and finances all worked out in the right way. There has to be a personal connection as well, and I would want to work with someone who really wants to make the guitar come alive on stage. You have to be tight with people you work with, you spend more time with them than you do with your family, so a good band leader knows how to develop that connection and make it work. You learn how people conduct themselves and interact with each other, even if they are really high-end players, they invite the new guy in and make him or her feel welcome and part of what's going on."

The new album, the first track Bitches Brew really comes out of the traps at a gallop, like you are setting out the stall for what's coming, I say:

"It does, and I think that after the layoff we had, it was good to get that attacking feeling going from the start. I use a couple of guitars double-tracked through a number of fuzz pedals. One is my vintage Gibson SG which I use a lot in the studio, and the other is a Stratocaster, and I simply overdub one onto the other to get that full-on sound. I wanted quite an echoey ambient sound because I recorded my first album in a really big room and that had a lot of ambient atmospheres on it, and I really want to try and recapture that for this record."
"Studio and the stage are very different, but we have a great sound engineer, Jeffrey Holdip, and he knows how to mix 'big' sounds for us in whatever venue we are working. I think that live blues should be a little rough around the edges, and we aim for that when we play live. I think everyone does what they feel works for them, what they are comfortable with, and for us, it's a big and slight rough-around-the-edges atmosphere that we like to achieve. I should also mention Brian Moncarx who mixed a lot of the new album, he is a brilliant mixer, and Mark Rains engineered, and his studio vision is a big part of why the album sounds how it does," he adds.

How does he create his 'own' sound, comes next:

"I guess the only way I can look at it, is that I absolutely don't want to be like anyone else. I don't want to try and play like Robin Trower or Stevie Ray, or Robert Cray, those guys are immense talents, so I would never try and copy them, but I have, and I do study them, because they are the masters. It's not a case of looking at a film of Stevie Ray and trying to figure out how he did things, it's a life-long journey for me, it's a commitment to learn and improve all the time. I can always play it better tomorrow, I can refine this. I can't play like Albert Collins, but I see film of him, and head back to the practice room and start working at what I like about what he does. What I can do, is play the stuff and then take it in another direction, my direction, I take what I love from the players I admire, and try and put them through my own filter. It's all been done, the book is written it's about absorbing the lineage and explore what they did, talk about the legends and how they did what they did."

Already popular, with a following in the European blues scene, looking ahead, I guess he'll be touring in Europe, with feedback from UK shows really strong.

"Hopefully, yeah. The plan is for as many shows in Europe as we can get. We move on from gig to gig, and don't always get to hear about how we went down, so thanks very much for letting me know that, it means a lot."

"I have a bunch of new songs I am working on, and I trying to figure out one particular song, and I'm looking at getting the lyrics right. I am looking at going into the studio for a three-day session again, like I did for the album, because that worked very well. So, the new album is coming out, and I can tell you that there may well be something else following that up really really soon, some songs, not sure how many, but they are coming through. Thank you so much for your support at Blues Matters Magazine,and helping me get my music out there. See you all real soon.

Philip Sayce's new album "The Wolves Are Coming" will be released by Atomic Gemini/ Forty Below Records on February 23 via www.philipsayce.com and www.fortybelowrecords.com.

CHRIS O'LEARY

Colin Campbell Paul Natkin

In the realm of contemporary blues, Chris O'Leary stands as a formidable force, a harmonica virtuoso, and a soulful vocalist whose musical journey weaves through the rich tapestry of American roots music.

With a career that spans decades, O'Leary has earned his stripes as a true bluesman, channelling the raw, emotive power of the genre's pioneers while infusing it with his own distinctive style. Hailing from the musical hotbed of New York, O'Leary's authentic approach to the blues has garnered widespread acclaim, making him a respected figure in the blues community. As we delve into the depths of his musical odyssey, we uncover the stories behind the notes, the passion that fuels his performances, and the profound connection he maintains with the timeless spirit of the blues. We talked about assorted topics including the new release The Hard Line.

We discuss various aspects of his life and career. Hailing from New York and now residing in Virginia, he humorously expressed his departure from the snowy winters of his hometown, stating, "Life's too short to spend it in snow." Raised in a family with a musical background, Chris observed his siblings' talents. Despite their gifts, they didn't pursue music actively. As the youngest, he became a keen observer, watching their passions wane. Reflecting on his family's struggles, he praises his mother as a superhero, raising four kids on minimal resources: "She made it look easy. She was my original superhero."

While he occasionally pondered NFL dreams, the allure of music took precedence, driven by the determination not to fall short again: "I knew exactly what I didn't do to make it into the play for pro football!"

Acknowledging occasional regrets about the NFL, Chris remains content, realising the demands of being great at one thing prevent him from pursuing another: "If you're going to be great at something, you don't have time to be good at something else." This sentiment encapsulates his unwavering commitment to his musical craft.

When asked about his musical journey and the blues, he credits his father's eclectic taste, ranging from Vivaldi to Springsteen, as the foundation. Describing the pivotal moment when he discovered the blues, he reminisced about hearing Muddy Waters' "I'm Ready," delivered with what he described as "… just such goddamn ferocity."

This encounter sparked his passion for the blues, emphasising the genre's cathartic and therapeutic role in his life.

Reflecting on his blues philosophy, he talks about writing from personal experiences, noting, "I write about what I know." He also highlights the significance of African American music, acknowledging its heritage and expressing his genuine love for it. Describing blues as a form of storytelling, he shared, "It's a way of life for me, it's therapeutic."

Delving into his unconventional segue into the Marine Corps, he revealed the influence of his father, a Green Beret, on this decision. Despite the regimented military life being a far cry from the erratic world of a musician, he acknowledged the valuable experiences and stories it provided, shaping his songwriting.

The conversation shifts towards a transformative moment in his career when he joined Levon Helm's band, becoming the house band at Helm's club in New Orleans.

"When I first connected with Levon, he visited the studio located in the remote upstate New York mountains. We were initially sceptical that he would make the trip, but he surprised us. The demo we played for him caught his attention, and he ended up playing the tracks we requested, staying all night immersed in blues. It was a magical experience, and we shared his love for the music, even delving into intricate Pat Curtis and Sonny Boy Williamson compositions. Following that night, his manager, Butch, contacted us while we were at a Mexican restaurant in New York, leading to an offer from Levon to become the house band at his club on Decatur Street in New Orleans." Describing it as a life-changing opportunity, he humorously recalled informing his then-wife about the move, stating, "Well, that went over really well!"

Discussing further about his musical upbringing, he rrecalls playing in the band and singing in the choir during school days, which helped significantly. His harmonica skills were

THE HARD LINE

heavily influenced by James Cotton, whom he affectionately refers to as 'my guy.' Recalling a poignant moment with Cotton, he shares the story of hearing Muddy Waters' record, marking a turning point in his musical journey. "I love Big Walter and Sonny Boy and Little Walter. But Cotton's my guy, you know, I'm not a technician, I don't have the patience to sit there and write music. I play from the seat of my pants. I play what I feel, and I try to push out as much of me as I can while still remaining within the blues tradition."

The interview touched on the blues philosophy once again, with Chris stressing the importance of honesty in songwriting. He expressed gratitude for living a "crazy life" that provided him with a vast palette to draw from when creating music.

Transitioning to his latest album and signing with Alligator Records, he credits the pandemic for providing him the time to write and record. Describing the album as a culmination of years of challenging work, he expressed his desire to continue with the label, stating, "I love the fact that I'm an Alligator artist."

The interview shed light on specific tracks, such as "I Cry at Night," addressing the epidemic of veteran suicide. He spoke passionately about raising awareness for this issue through his music, sharing personal experiences and connecting with his audience on a deeper level. As the interview touched on various tracks from the album, he discussed the song "Ain't That A Crime" inspired by personal experiences of someone leaving and leaving behind unwanted baggage. With humour and candidness, he shared insights into the inspiration behind tracks like "Love for Sale" and "You Break It, You Bought It."

The conversation extended to songwriting, with the artist acknowledging the positive impact of collaborating with band members and co-writing with others. He praised the collaborative process for providing fresh perspectives and keeping his creativity flowing.

Looking to the future, he expressed contentment with his current band, affirming the importance of enjoying the camaraderie on and off stage. Regarding future projects, he hinted at touring to support his latest record and shared that the groundwork for the next album was already in progress.

In concluding remarks, the artist expressed his definition of success, stating, "I'm already successful." He highlighted the importance of family, a great band, and a fulfilling life, that being an Alligator artist was a significant milestone in his musical journey.

The interview concludes with a brief discussion on bringing blues to a younger audi-ence. Chris talked passionately about keeping the blues genre evolving with other musical forms like Americana. "Blues has influenced so much of the music we hear today, and it's about making those connections. When you listen to rock, country, or even hip-hop, you can trace back elements to the blues. So, it's about showing the young audience those connections, the roots of the music they love.

And Americana, well, it's the blending of different American music genres, and blues is a crucial component of that. You can introduce young listeners to blues through the broader umbrella of Americana, showing them the rich history and variety within American music.
In live performances, energy is key. Blues can be electrifying, and when a young audience experiences the raw emotion and skill of a live blues perfor-mance, it can be a game-changer. It's about breaking down stereotypes and show-casing the diversity within the genre."

"Moreover, storytelling is an essential part of the blues. Young people resonate with stories, and if they can connect with the narratives presented in blues songs, it be-comes a personal experience rather than just a genre of music. Blues has a way of expressing universal emotions and experiences that transcend age. Collaborations with contemporary artists can also bridge the gap. When blues artists collaborate with musicians from other genres, it introduces the blues to new audienc-es. This cross-pollination of styles that can be a powerful way to keep the blues alive and relevant. Ultimately, it's a gradual process. Introducing the blues to a younger audience requires creativity, open-mindedness, and a genuine passion for the music. By demonstrating the interconnectedness of musical genres and emphasizing the emotional depth and storytelling of the blues, it becomes more accessible and appeal-ing to a new generation."

For further information see website: thechrisolearyband.net

THANKS, BILL

AN INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN BURT

Colin Campbell   Delaney Burt

Kevin Burt, a luminary in the realm of blues music, stands as a testament to the genre's enduring power to evoke raw emotion and capture the essence of the human experience. He has emerged as a distinctive voice in the blues landscape, wielding his soulful vocals, masterful guitar skills, and an unwavering commitment to authenticity. With a career spanning several decades, Burt has not only mastered the traditional sounds of blues but has also seamlessly integrated a spectrum of influences and different music styles on his musical journey.

Blues Matters caught up with him at his home in Iowa where we chat about his career and influences including talking about his newest release, Thank You Brother Bill: A Tribute to Bill Withers.

Kevin Burke reflects on his musical journey, sharing insights into his family background, early exposure to music, and the diverse talents within his siblings. He touches on the musical inclinations of his brothers and sister, highlighting their unique gifts and how their paths diverged from pursuing their talents. His musical journey started with an unconventional guitar purchase, emphasising the practicality over flash:

"I was like, because, you know, the people that I admire, they didn't have the best. They just had what they could afford." He recognises the essence of his performances lie in his voice, not a flashy guitar: "You don't need a flashy guitar...nobody was going to come to watch me play guitar." Transitioning to harmonica, he found parallels with singing, both requiring self-awareness and avoiding annoyance. Raised in a family with a musical background, he observed his siblings' talents. Despite their gifts, they didn't pursue music actively. As the youngest, he became a keen observer, witnessing their passions wane. Reflecting on his family's struggles, he praised his mother as a superhero, raising four kids on minimal resources:

"She made it look easy. She was my original superhero." While Quiett occasionally pondered NFL

dreams, the allure of music took precedence, driven by the determination not to fall short again: "I knew exactly what I didn't do to make it into the play for pro football. If you're going to be great at something, you don't have time to be good at something else." This sentiment encapsulates his unwavering commitment to his musical craft.

Kevin reminisced about his time being a social worker, sharing experiences from his advocacy work for individuals with disabilities. He reflected on the knowledge gained during that period and how he unintentionally acquired valuable skills for his later career in music. Despite holding a degree in human services and psychology, Kevin found solace in music. A chance encounter with Ethel Madison, a Memphis native, led to an unexpected audition for a blues band. Though initially hesitant, his musical journey unfolded, leading to a successful audition that marked the beginning of a 30-year career.

The discussion delved into Kevin's self-taught journey with the guitar and harmonica, emphasising the importance of stage time and continuous improvement. He describes his rigorous schedule of playing multiple shows per day, honing his skills, and learning to connect with audiences in various settings.
As the conversation transitions to Kevin's vocal training, he acknowledges receiving guidance on breathing techniques from an opera student he was trying to impress. He highlighted the significance of learning to sing from the diaphragm and the inadvertent training he received during long drives, singing along to soul classics.

Kevin talked about initial challenges with stage fright, his early performance strategies, and the evolution of his stagecraft. He shares insights into his approach to playing in smaller rural communities, bypassing major cities to establish a presence in less explored areas. Detailing his experiences with house gigs at local venues, notably at Checkers Tavern and Q Dawgs Barbecue, Burt emphasises the importance of stage time and the hustle mentality. The interview concludes with Kevin discussing his music style, storytelling philosophy, and the emotional exchange between artist and audience in the blues genre.

Also, we discussed the best advice he received in his musical career, with the recurring theme of being true to oneself. He reiterated the importance of not trying to imitate others and encourages aspiring musicians to be the 'first me.' He reflects on the guidance received from various legendary figures in the music industry, such as Bill Withers, Buddy Guy, B.B. King, and others.

We discuss his musical influences, acknowledging the impact of blues legends like the Three Kings (B.B, Albert, and Freddie), Little Walter, James Cotton, Howlin' Wolf, and Sonny Boy Williamson. He highlights the unexpected influence of Stevie Wonder on his harmonica playing and the significance of connecting with the stories behind the songs.

Success, for Kevin, is framed as the opportunity to be invited to perform and be respected by those he admires. He expresses gratitude for being recognised by younger musicians and cherishes the ability to offer advice and inspiration to them.

The discussion touched on the evolving nature of the music industry, particularly the changing ways people discover music today compared to the past. Kevin encourages younger generations to explore various genres and create their definition of 'popular' music.

The conversation delved into the challenges faced by blues music in maintaining its value and recognition. He advocates for educating younger generations about the roots and history of blues to ensure its continued appreciation, with projects like Blues in The Schools. He shares his unique perspective as an artist from Iowa, considering it a convergence point for various influences.

The interview shifts to the artist's recent projects, notably a Bill Withers tribute album. He explains his motivation behind the tribute, expressing a deep connection to Withers' music and a desire to pay homage. We discussed the struggle with the industry's inclination towards tribute acts and his determination to maintain his individuality.

Towards the end of the interview, Kevin reflected on the essence of success as making a difference in someone's life. He emphasised the simple yet profound aspects of life and his commitment to being authentic and unapologetically himself. The conversation concluded with a light-hearted anecdote about encounters with fellow musicians, especially one that included a scenario relating to being on the road with his blues friend Albert Castiglia.

Kevin went on to discuss reasons behind making this latest Bill Withers' release:
"This is my tribute to a man that was an influence to me. His music meant the world to me, more than I realised. It's one of those things; you don't know what you got until it's gone. You know, when he passed away, I always knew that he was an influence on me, and it never went away. It was one of those things where, what I've got of Mr. Withers, that is what he's given me."

The selection process revolves around moments that have presented themselves in various parts of his life stages. "The songs chosen are not merely a collection of melodies but instead serve as markers for significant events and feelings." As he delved further into the motivations behind their choices, a deeply personal and emotive connection emerges.

'Grandma's Hands' is highlighted as a poignant example. Initially, the song held sentimental value, representing an unfulfilled connection with the artist's grandmother. However, its significance took an unexpected turn when the artist's mother, in her final moments in hospice, requested the song for her funeral. Suddenly, the song acquired an additional layer of profound sorrow, becoming a vessel for grief and an emotional tribute to a loved one.

His struggle to perform this song at the funeral reveals the power of music to encapsulate complex emotions. The song, once a source of fond memories, now became a channel for pain and a tool for processing loss. The artist's ability to convey this transformation through performance speaks to the intimate relationship between the artist, the song, and the audience.

The collaborative aspect of music creation is also shown when he engages with his band to translate the emotional journey into a collective experience. By sharing the backstory and the emotional nuances behind the song choices, he ensures that the bandmates are not just playing notes but are emotionally invested participants in the narrative being woven through the music.

The discussion extends to other song choices, such as 'Who Is He?' and 'I Hope She'll Be Happier,' each offering a window into the artist's emotional landscape. 'Who Is He?' taps into the complexities of relationships, exploring themes of frustration and deception." It becomes a cathartic release, a means to expose emotional wounds to the healing air.

'I Hope She'll Be Happier' takes on a remarkably personal significance, reflecting a pivotal moment in the artist's relationship. The song becomes a lesson in love, transcending mere words and embodying a deep desire for the other person's happiness, even if it means being apart. It underscores the transformative power of music in facilitating introspection, growth, and healing.

Kevin's approach to song selection involves a meticulous consideration of the emotional narratives woven into each piece. These songs are not just a collection of tunes but are vessels for stories and healing, and bridges connecting him to his audience through shared experiences of love, loss, and personal growth. His commitment to conveying the "why" behind each song sets the stage for a concert experience that goes beyond mere entertainment, inviting the audience into an immersive emotional journey.

Looking ahead, Kevin looks thoughtful and explains: " You know, I am going to do this as long as I possibly can. As long as the good lord lets me do it! I have got more original songs, more stories to tell. I am remarkably pleased with working with Mike Zito and Gulf Coast records. Mike's fantastic, I love him like family. Um, I have been blessed that the two record labels that I've been on, that's exactly what it feels like is, is people I'm working with, people that care about me."

Throughout the interview, Kevin Burt's passion for music, storytelling, and connecting with his audience shines through. His journey reflects resilience, determination, and a genuine commitment to the emotional depth of the blues genre. The interview concludes with Kevin discussing his music style, storytelling philosophy, and the emotional exchange between artist and audience in the blues genre.

For further information see website: kevinburtmusic.net.

DRIVING ON

MICHAEL MESSER

Iain Patience   Alan Messer

Michael Messer is a well-known, UK acoustic picker with a background that truly surprises and a back-catalogue of albums that include the remarkable, and remarkably successful, Mitra, with Call of the Blues, a release that pulled influences from Asia and India into a western music mix and proved to be a genuinely unique bit of work.

When I mention that particular release, he laughs easily and explains he had long been interested in doing something along those lines but never able to find a suitable band of musical brothers to work with.

Of course, it's impossible to consider that offering from 2016 without bells chiming of others who looked east for inspiration and interest, the late Davy Graham, for one; George Harrison, and the Beatles themselves with the Maharishi Mahash Yogi, in the 1960s, leading to working with sitar master, Ravi Shanker. But despite this history, Messer's visionary release was one that simply exploded with class, tasteful, soulful playing and innovative sound.

With four decades and ten albums now below his belt, Messer is an industry veteran, always prepared to take an unexpected step into the unknown. It seems strange to think that this guy once had a career as a ladies hairdresser, a stylist to the stars of early 1970s UK, whose work appeared on many internationally famous publications like Vogue. So, how did he switch to become a musician, I ask:

"Well, I had a girlfriend and we moved off to live in the north, in Yorkshire. But after a few years that sort of fizzled out and we separated. I had been playing guitar for many years and I just thought to myself it was now or never. It was time I gave it a go. So, I moved back to London and gave it my best shot."

But that was then, this is now, and today Messer has a totally different musical offering to hand. Mostly We Drive is a delightful release, where Messer delivers his usual stunning fretwork alongside one of his best buddies, Chaz Jankel of startlingly original and powerfully successful band, the Blockheads. Messer wrote all of the lyrics in this eleven-track album but describes the production process as being more a 'Jamlike' meeting of musical minds where one or other might arrive in the studio with a riff or a bit of a theme, then sitting down together a rounded sound would soon develop from the musical union.

Michael Messer's reputation as an innovator in the blues genre and master of slide guitar is well known. For forty years and ten albums Messer has been unafraid to incorporate reggae, African stylings, Hindustani classical music and even turntablism into his individual vision of the blues. Messer's album 'King Guitar' topped the US Living Blues chart, while his latest Call Of The Blues, garnered airplay in over 50 countries. Johnny Cash even professed himself a fan and wrote the liner notes for Michael's award-winning collaboration album 'Rhythm Oil'.

> *time becomes so precious*

'What I hear here is the real thing. This record carried me away to a long time ago, down a Delta dirt road to a land of my musical good-old-daysing.' Said Johnny Cash from his Hendersonville, Tennessee home back in 1992.

In 1973 Chaz Jankel opened his account, placing a track on a Long John Baldry album. Later in the '70s he joined Kilburn & The High Roads and started writing with the frontman, one Ian Dury. Jankel's partnership with Dury continued through The Blockhead years and beyond, producing stone-cold classics such as 'Hit Me With Your Rhythm Stick' and 'Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll'. In the 1980s, as well as having success on the US Dance scene, Chaz wrote 'Ai No Corrida', a hit for Quincy Jones. Jankel also has composer credits for soundtracks, including D.O.A. and K2. He continues to release solo albums, and tour with The Blockheads.

Chaz and Michael have known each other since those early Blockhead days, but had never managed to get together in a studio or on a stage. Michael takes up the story:

"Chaz is a genuine multi-instrumentalist and a great writer. In early March 2020, we decided that it was about time we got together for a jam. So a few days before the Covid lockdown I drove over to Chaz's. When I arrived, to my surprise, Chaz had spent the morning in his studio, putting some musical ideas together for me to add my parts to."

Jankel explains: "I thought it wise to prepare a few musical sketches on my Mac, based on how I thought we could collaborate. This was really the stock for the soup."

Messer continues: "A couple of days later, Chaz sent me some rough mixes. We were both excited about the music and agreed that we had the bones of an album. Then, lockdown was upon us... I started writinglyrics and Chaz continued sending musical ideas over. It wasn't until September 2021 that we started recording what was to become an album. Over the following year we constructed, created, recorded and mixed the music ourselves, which enabled us to focus. It was a wonderful experience, because we were pulling each other in different directions, and hopefully producing great music along the way.".

Chaz concurs: "That's been the journey throughout making this album. There is a crossover point where our different musical orientations chime and here it is. During our recent photo session, as the camera clicked away, we played through these songs, two guitars, or one guitar and one piano. They felt so good to play. The path continues... "

Michael adds: "The lyrics on this album, although written by me, were inspired by ideas that came from both of us while talking about all kinds of things, but with themes often returning to the state of our world and how time becomes so precious as we grow older."

Messer delivers these thought-provoking, often

humorous, lyrics in his wry, warm, experienced voice. There is cynicism and existential angst, yes, but there is often a celebratory tone too. The varied, mesmerising rhythms of the music are matched by verses which obviously borrow a poetic ethos from the likes of Chuck Berry, Bob Dylan and past blues masters.

The title track lopes along, inflected with guitars which speak of both cowboy trails and Hawaiian hulas – 'One day we die, the rest we're alive/Some days we walk, mostly we drive.' When the cops pull the narrator over, he wonders – 'Will they want my driver's licence or my genetic code.'

The hypnotic, skew-whiff, one-chord blues of 'I Have Seen The Light' summons memories of Son House, Ry Cooder and his erstwhile employer Captain Beefheart. The bubbling bass, beat poetry and joyful sentiment of 'Music Brings Us Closer Together' evoke thoughts of prime Ian Dury; while the album's sole instrumental, 'Arcadia' – with Messer's singing slide to the fore – conjures a Sunday drive through rural England.

After warning of the ravages of business-as-usual capitalism and concomitant environmental destruction on several tracks, the final number, 'Time Well Spent', borrows the tested and true Rollin' and Tumblin' riff and enjoins us to...'Spend your time well/In this world we behold/Life is short and precious/Be hot before you get cold.'

As we wind up our chat, having last met in summer 2023 at Kent's Black Deer Americana Festival, we chat briefly about Messer Guitars, a side-project that grew by chance into another unexpected turn in the road, with signature model, steel resonator guitars that are generally much admired and enjoyed by blues pickers globally. Michael confirms, that it's great fun to have this sideline but the music remains his passion looking ahead.

BEX MARSHALL

FORTUNA FAVOURS...

Colin Campbell Rob Blackham

Bex Marshall, an influential figure in blues music hailing from Devon, England, is celebrated for her dynamic prowess as a guitarist and vocalist, transcending the conventional boundaries of traditional blues. Her music, characterised by a voice that can both soothe and electrify, coupled with a mastery of the guitar that commands attention, displays her captivating and innovative spirit. Marshall's journey through the blues is not merely a musical exploration but a testament to her authenticity and unwavering dedication to preserving and evolving this rich musical tradition. Got the chance to catch up with her recently to discuss her musical journey and her new release. Fortuna.

Bex Marshall's musical journey began at the age of eight when her uncle, a member of The Marauders band, gifted her a first guitar, leaving a lasting impact on the budding musician. Reflecting on this pivotal moment, she recalls,: "His projection of voice and the guitar... it changed my life." The influence of uncle's Roy Orbison-like voice inspired in her a deep desire to master both vocals and guitar playing. Immersed in a family environment rich with diverse musical influences, she explored her uncle's pristine album collection, describing it as, "Like a degree in rock, blues, and all sorts of other good stuff." Her early experiences involved sneaking into her uncle's room to listen and absorb the varied genres that would shape her own musical identity.

A significant turning point in technical development came when her mother arranged guitar lessons from a local artist and musician. This mentor introduced her to fingerpicking, spanning classical to flamenco, and opened a new dimension to her musical repertoire. "He was an incredible fingerpicker, a very chilled out hippy, but a great fingerpicker."

Throughout her teens, musical tastes continued to evolve, influenced by rock and various genres. After a brief hiatus, she embarked on a transformative journey, hitchhiking through Australia and gaining a trade as a croupier in Holland. The vibrant busker scene in Australia left an indelible mark, "I really got to up my game."

Upon returning from her travels, she felt a renewed sense of purpose, recognising the need to enhance musical skills. This period of self-discovery laid the foundation for her musical career, "I've really got to get my shit together here." Her journey, marked by familial influences, diverse experiences, and a commitment to musical excellence continues.

After returning to London, she worked in a casino while concurrently writing and assembling her band. Her introduction to the 12 Bar Club and meeting her husband, Barry, opened the door to a rich world of Americana, blues, and roots music, providing inspiration for her own work. She reminisces, "And his record collection, it was something else."

Under Barry's influence, Bex delved into the old-style blues and Americana, akin to a "music degree" lived through experience. Her first album in 2002, unreleased digitally, showcased acoustic rock elements. Reflecting on the album, she mentions, "It was one of those typical scenarios where I had to sign up for 12 years... and they didn't do much with it. "Subsequent albums like, Kitchen Table" (2008) marked a shift towards a rootsy vibe, incorporating more acoustic elements and slide guitar". Bex expresses comfort and growth in this direction. The House Of Mercy released ten years later, "reflects a more produced sound, with influences from gospel and bluegrass. I wanted to throw everything in... and some really hot players on there."

Discussing, Fortuna, her latest record, Bex shares her return to the blues, embracing a more electric guitar-oriented sound. This album departs from the roots elements, and she emphasises, "I've revisited the blues a bit more." The recording took place at the House of Mercy, representing a new phase in her musical exploration.

Having a recording studio in the house during lockdown is described as "magical" by Bex as it provides an escape from the confines of the home. Reflecting on the fortuitous circumstances during the lockdown, she recalls being accompanied by their bass player, Robert Eugene Daniels with whom they had been touring extensively. The two were engrossed in demo-ing the record, a process that took on new significance when the bass player tragically passed away a few months later.

In response to the challenges, Bex gathered the band and converted their entire house into a recording studio. Describing the setup, it noted the use of different spaces for various elements, including drums in one room and guitar and vocals in the living room, creating a nostalgic, "Old-fashioned studio where anything can happen."

She explains the thinking behind the wonderful title track, Fortuna: "That's fast. It's, really in your face and played on the resonator. It's a full on a ragtime resonator instrumental. I love instrumentals, I think they're important. Obviously, that stems from, my classical background. The music just speaks for itself. You don't need lyrics all the time and to follow the melody line of a of a of an instrumental is just as rewarding. It just manifested into when I started playing it with a band, I just thought, this sounds great. This is something new and we were playing it as a three piece, and it was so intense, and people loved it. I mean, boom! you stick it in between a full-on track and a ballad, it was a lovely sort of segue. It gives the listener as well, a break from the vocal, because I'm always banging out the vocals and it's nice to give that sort of break. It's like playing slide guitar on a track, I don't want to do slide all the way through the track."

We discuss the collaborative nature of the recording process, highlighting a sense of camaraderie among the team members. Despite the sombre events surrounding the bass player's passing, the artist and their team regrouped at home, turning it into a makeshift studio fostering a relaxed and enjoyable recording atmosphere, allowing them to take their time without external pressures. "We enjoyed this one. There was no pressure. It's more like we've done this before, sort of thing. We're a proven team." This project, while not diminishing the enjoyment of previous endeavours, is perceived as less DIY and more refined, signifying the growth and evolution of their collaborative efforts.

> *That's the audience for me down there!*

Discussing the multifaceted role of being a producer, singer, and songwriter, Bex acknowledges the necessity of stepping away from the artist's mindset. They describe the importance of viewing the project from a different perspective, asserting control over the sound and arrangement choices. "It's difficult to let someone else mould it. But, you know, at the end of the day, it's my project, and I know how I want it to sound. I go with my gut instinct with a lot of things." Bex also talked of the importance of strong songwriting, asserting that "the songwriting is as important as the vocal," recognising that quality songs form the foundation of a successful album.

This project initially served as a halfway house for musicians in London. Bex reminisces, " Barry would book the bands at the Borderline, and mostly they would come here and stay, and they'd always be welcome with something hot on the stove." This endeavour, known as the House of Mercy, provided a welcoming space for touring musicians, offering a respite from the road. She elaborates on how their journey extended to Cyprus, describing a fortuitous turn of events involving tickets to a Tom Waits concert. The decision to sell the tickets on eBay, resulting in a substantial amount, led to an impromptu holiday to Cyprus.

"Long story short, after two weeks, we fell in love with the place so much, we bought a place." Despite initial challenges and uncertainties, they eventually acquired a beautiful property on the beach, creating a home away from home. The retreat serves multiple purposes, acting as a bolthole for relaxation, fitness, and writing. The artist emphasizes the continuation of Barry's work, particularly in supporting new music and emerging artists. The Cyprus retreat becomes a writing haven, allowing the artists to pursue their passion for creating and promoting new music. Bex continues, "So for me, it's more like continuing his work but doing a writing retreat there because he was very much into promoting new music." This reflects a commitment to nurturing artistic talent, a sentiment rooted in Barry's legacy.

Regarding the recording setup, she mentions that they do not have a recording studio in Cyprus. Instead, they opt for live recordings, engaging local Turkish musicians to infuse a unique flavour into the sessions, creating an old-fashioned, intimate atmosphere reminiscent of musical gatherings in a home. The retreat serves as a testament to the artist's passion for fostering creativity and providing a welcoming space for musicians—"a place where the baton of musical legacy is carried forward with a sense of responsibility and joy."

Being onstage is Bex's 'happy zone,' she reflects on the Brazilian audience in particular and their adoration of Janis Joplin. I've never seen anything like it. When I started touring down there, I was going on stages, playing, and singing. But the thing is down there, Janis Joplin is huge. She's like a god down in Brazil. Not to say that the Americans don't appreciate her because, she's their gal. But in Brazil, it's like it's like the Beatles. The reaction is like the Beatles, they scream the women scream. Then if I'm playing guitar and doing a lead guitar, like a Hendrix's type of song and singing like Janis, they lose it. They're empowered and they take their flip flops off and throw them at my feet. That's the audience for me down there!"

"I'm doing a tribute to Tina Turner when I go to Mexico in January. They've asked me to do a night of, um, of Tina/ Janis. Well, I toured with Sam Andrews, and the Big Brother and Holding Company as a different tour. So, in a roundabout way, the whole band I've toured with, but at different times! Right. I love being in contact with those San Francisco hippies, the Woodstock boys. It's a wonderful musical culture over there. I want to just enjoy what I have the music, the music, I want to be able to do great projects in my own time and to be able to choose what I do when I do it. I'm happy with the way things are going. I'm really looking forward to having this new record out so I can talk about it. I'm excited to do more projects. Bex Marshall's new album "Fortuna" is released by Dixiefrog Records on March 1st. Get it from bexmarshall.com and dixiefrog.com

MOJO WORKING
INTERVIEW WITH ROGER EARL (FOGHAT)

Stephen Harrison   Arnie Goodman

Having left Savoy Brown in 1971, Dave Peverett (Lonesome Dave), Tony Stevens, and Roger Earl went on to form Foghat, adding Rod Price on Slide Guitar, a feature that has been synonymous with the band from that day. Their debut album, Goghatr, released in 1972 featured Willie Dixon's, ' I Just Want To Make Love To You' alongside, a remake of the Savoy Brown classic, 'Leavin' Again (Again)'.

Gold albums followed, touring saw the band enhance their reputation as a solid Blues/Rock band, with continued success in various guises through the 70s, 80s, and 90s. Now the band has released a new album, Sonic Mojo, coincidently two of the songs were co-written with former Savoy Brown frontman Kim Simmonds shortly before he sadly passed away. I caught up with drummer, Roger Earl to chat about Sonic Mojo, Savoy Brown, and everything in between.

"We are actually staying in Wallingford, where Foghat was born, and where we played our very first gig, we all came from around here, so It's a kind of full-circle journey for us. The village pub, The George is where we used to hang out. Our very first gig as Foghat was played in the village, It's called The Corn Exchange now, so I have very fond memories of being down here, It's lovely to be back on home turf as it were."

Incidentally, Blues Matters Magazine started its life as a bit of a fanzine by our former creator, Alan, for the band, Savoy Brown, a memory not lost on either Roger or I. The whole basis of Blues Matters Magazine was borne out of an appreciation of the music of Savoy Brown and the esteem in which they were held. That is one of the reasons I was so pleased to get a copy of Sonic Mojo, knowing that Kim Simmonds had been a part of it. After listening to the album, I was interested in how, after so many years, Foghat and Kim got together with the rest of the band and recorded an album of new material, and also some classic Blues tunes, that don't always rate a mention.

"At this moment in time, the album is No.1 on the Billboard Blues Chart. We were actually No.1 in the first week the album was released, and this is the seventh week we've been on there, so yeah, we are to say the least, over the moon with how the album is being received. I thought that we did a really good job with this record, we took our time with it. As is usual with the way that this band works, we all worked on the songs together, we, I think, got it as good as we could get it. The thing is, our lead guitarist and slide guitarist, Bryan Bassett, is also our engineer and producer. The man is brilliant, he was also a studio engineer at Kingsnake Records down in Florida when he joined the band after Lonesome Dave had passed away. I said, we need to get a studio, somewhere of our own where we won't be disturbed, so a friend of ours gave us this huge warehouse down in Florida, we borrowed microphones and various bits and bobs from people. Then after ' Family Jewels' came out, if we were going to continue with the band as a functioning band, we had to have somewhere to rehearse. We can go in, play, and if we think we've got something, we press the record button. That's basically how Sonic Mojo came to be."

With five covers on the album, we can see the artists that have influenced Foghat since its inception in the early 70s, But not all covers are run-of-the-mill,on-the-tip-of-your-tongue Blues standards most bands have covered over the years. That, for me, speaks volumes about Foghat as a band, the willingness to be innovative, even with a cover, not going for the obvious. Also, writing a couple of tunes with Kim Simmonds on this album, they did not rely on, or hark back to what they were doing fifty years ago. There is a freshness about the album, a freshness that highlights the band as still a force to be reckoned with. Promised Land (Chuck Berry), How Many More Years (Chester Burnett) and Mean Woman Blues (Claude Demetrius) just add that little bit of something extra to the album.

"It wasn't like back in the 70s, where we had to make at least one album per year for the record company, then immediately start on the other one, but to be fair, that did work for us as well, especially when you are young and hungry. Now, we just love to play, and make music, I hope you get to come and see us one of these days (Try and keep me away, Roger). What we are trying to do, we've had a chat with our manager, is to maybe do a festival, then do a bunch of clubs so that people can see what we are all about. Foghat hasn't played here since about 1973, so it's high time we came back. We did a tour with Captain Beefheart for three

weeks, on that tour, we had a little bit too much fun (lol). He asked us one time, 'Can you get any weed' and we said, not really, we only smoke Hashish over here, and he was like, 'What the hell is that like!' So you can imagine what kind of tour that was (lol). But we did get to play at The Royal Albert Hall, so it was really cool actually. But all of a sudden our work dried up. Derek Taylor, who was the Beatles' publicist, and was working for Warner Brothers at the time, helped us enormously. He liked the band a lot. We got a call from our manager, went to the States, and proceeded to play everywhere and anywhere."

It's hard to imagine a band that had grown out of an already successful band and then had a very well-received album from the offshoots of that band, a great tour of the UK, could suddenly find themselves struggling for work. Even though the work had dried up in the UK, Foghat still had a big following in the States, playing live gigs and releasing albums sporadically.

"We'd taken to playing in people's backyards, we played anywhere that we could get a gig. Albert Grossman, at our record company, was always behind us, and the label really got behind us when we released, Energised, and Rock And Roll Outlaws, they put some serious ads behind the albums. We also played a few gigs with Savoy Brown over the years, our manager got us on the same circuit, and sometimes me and Kim would sit in with each other in various guises of both of the bands. Over the last ten years or so, Kim and I kept in touch. In fact, Kim and I always kept in touch, and we never had any problems, musically and socially, we would always hang out."

The more Roger and I chat, the more I understand the close relationship that Foghat and Savoy Brown enjoyed in the very early 70s. As Roger alludes to, they had much of the same introductions to music, many of the same influences, and starting their respective musical journeys at around the same age. As young guys starting out in the music world, it's a beneficial thing to know that you have someone who shares the same visions as you, someone to hang out with away from recordings and live gigs. That, I think, is one of the reasons that Kim and Roger never had any problems band-wise.

"When we were recording with Foghat, and with Savoy Brown, we'd just go in and rehearse, everything was well rehearsed, and then we'd do it in one take. I only had one problem once when we were recording a song, it had a drum solo in it, and I dropped a drumstick during the drum solo. Chris Jordan was writing some great Blues lyrics, the lyrics would be so cool, and of course, Kim was really cool to play with. Kim was always a really good Blues guitarist, even back then."

As well as having this wonderful trip down memory lane with Roger, there was something else I needed to enquire about about the album, and the recent revival of Foghat - the inclusion of Scott Holt on vocals. A great addition to Foghat, and also with a brilliant CV in the Blues, most notably having worked alongside Buddy Guy.

" I think it was, 2014,somewhere around that time, we were looking for people in the band, possibly as understudies, because promoters put a lot of money into getting gigs together, so if any of us were taken ill, we would need an understudy so that gigs wouldn't have to be canceled. But we didn't have anyone for our lead singer Charlie Huhn. Arnie Goodman suggested Scott Holt. So we had a chat with Scott and sent him a bunch of songs to learn. He came down to the warehouse, plugged in, we started jamming and we all had a great time. As far as I was concerned, it was the beginning of a beautiful adventure, it gave us a great shot in the arm. While we were recording our last album, Under The Influence, we were about three songs short of having enough material for a double album, so it ended up with me, Scott, and Bryan around the machine trying to come up with three songs. We came up with seventeen! So that was the sort of start of it. I love the man as a human being and as a band member. He has a brilliant knowledge of the Blues, which of course helps us all."

Foghat, with the release of Sonic Mojo, has proved that just because a band doesn't release an album every year, or are not constantly touring selling out venues far and wide, they no longer have anything to offer. It's a fitting tribute to Kim Simmonds, Savoy Brown, and Foghat, that there is still life in the old dogs yet. Old, wise, and very talented old dogs.

LIFE IS HARD

AN INTERVIEW WITH MIKE ZITO

Colin Campbell Supplied

Mike Zito, a renowned blues guitarist, stands as a distinctive force in the world of blues music. He has left an indelible mark with his soulful guitar playing and emotive vocals. Born in St. Louis, Missouri, he emerged as a prominent figure, earning acclaim not only for his technical prowess but also for his heartfelt songwriting. Zito's ability to channel raw emotion through his instrument and connect with audiences has made him a respected artist in the global blues community. Whether captivating listeners with his solo work or collaborating with other blues luminaries, Mike Zito continues to be a driving force in keeping the blues tradition alive and evolving. In a recent candid interview, Mike Zito provided insights into his well-being and the genesis of his new release; Life Is Hard, produced by Joe Bonamassa and Josh Smith and a cast of special musicians.

He expressed contentment and improvement in his life at present, stating, "I'm doing good, very good, it's much better than it was last year at this time." Reflecting on the album's origin, he revealed it was a collaborative effort with his wife, Laura, who was facing a terminal illness.

Describing the inception of the project, Mike shares: "It was really mine and my wife, Laura's idea." He acknowledges the seriousness of the situation, mentioning, "I said, you know, I think I'll need to, it's vital that I do this."

Discussing the musical inspiration behind the album, he emphasises the blues genre, stating: "I wanted it to be a blues record. Because I said, for the first time in my life, I feel like, I have the right to make a blues record." We discuss the universal theme of struggle in life, saying, "Everybody's got shit they're going through, and life is hard, you know?" Mike credits his wife for supporting the idea and highlights the emotional depth this brings to the album.

I knew, with the success of the Blood Brothers album, that Joe Bonamassa and Josh Smith were the right collaborators to produce the new one. I called Joe, and he enthusiastically agreed, saying, 'Yeah, hell yes. I'm honoured.' We decided on Sunset Sound in Hollywood to record there. I offered, 'I'll come to Los Angeles. You bring in your band, all your players.' Joe and Josh helped pick the songs. Despite the challenging time frame, Joe suggested Crossroads Festival in September. Everything aligned; the band came early for rehearsals. It just worked for everyone. We started putting together songs, and Joe and Josh picked great ones. You know, you can't write an entire record about your wife dying. But everybody can relate to losing love or losing a loved one. So, some of the songs are about she left or, they're blues songs about the woman's gone and whatever, but it all kind of tells that story. I really think we made a complete work of art from the songs we picked to the performances and that band, those musicians. Oh my God, yeah. You know, they brought me up to another level."

"We had a great time making this album; I make those guys laugh. But I also understand the gravity, making a record about a man's deceased wife is a profound artistic opportunity. It's not just about creating a record; it's about making art that's a testament, a moment in time. I wanted to help make this art, and they took it so serious, sincere, and genuine. Everything had to count; it had to be the top level. They were amazing, so respectful of the situation. I can't imagine doing this with anyone else. We are such good friends, and they knew my wife well. It's very difficult. I just sang and played guitar, Joe and Josh played all other guitars on the album. It's a beautiful tribute. Everyone that's listened to it, my mother-in-law, (It's the best album you've done worthy of a Grammy) my sister-in-law, my daughters, my children, they all love it. It would be great if this album could get some larger recognition for many reasons. Not for me, but for my wife or for the tribute part of the story. Yes, and for these guys, I mean for Joe and Josh and the musicians. Sure, they get paid to do it, but there's not enough money for what they've done. I'd love for them to get some kind of accolade for this! "

Mike explains the thinking and the process and meaning behind some of the songs on the new release:

"The Lonely Man: My take of the Otis Rush version of this song. Thought it would be a great opener to the album."

"The title track, Life Is Hard; I recorded it on a live album. That song is written by a great songwriter from Nashville named Fred James. Johnny Winter recorded it originally back in the early 1990s on an album that I just grew up loving. When I recorded that song live, Fred James reached out to me, so we became friends. The Blood Brothers, Albert, and I, we recorded two Fred James songs on the Blood Brothers album. I just always liked that song. And I thought, I want to make it an album like that and this the perfect title for sure what we're going through."

"Forever My Love. A year ago, I had this idea for one song, and it was going to be a big ballad, a Gary Moore style blues ballad. I picked the guitar up and I played a chord, and I sang. Laura came in and she goes, 'what's that?' And I said, I think it's going to be the song I'm going to write. I've never worked that hard on a song because I worked on it, and I sang it to her every morning into to July before she passed away. I knew I wouldn't be able to write a lot of songs, but I knew that song was so good. Vocally it's the hardest song to sing on the record because it's in a high range in the key of D minor. And, um, I knew I had to belt it out! Joe Bonamassa's backing singers are on this and were very emotional in the studio when it came to their parts to sing... It's the best song that I've ever written and recorded. "

"These Eyes; Josh White chose this and arranged it to suit my vocals. I listened to the Guess Who growing up, my sister had the records and I love Burton Cummings. musicianship. Would like to play this live but difficult as a four piece and without having Reese Wynans on keyboards and string arrangements and backing singers but you never know, it's now one of my favourites on the album. We'll find a way of doing this in a more earthy bluesy way! Josh also chose the Stevie Wonder tune, Have A Talk With God, it's the only upbeat song on the record, the only kind of hopeful song."

"I chose Walter Trout's Nobody Move Me Like You. I called Walter, he told me about this song. He wrote it when he thought he was going to die, and he wrote it for his wife. He was in tears when he realised, I wanted to record it. I also talked to Tinsley Ellis about recording his, Dying To Do Wrong, another great tune. I always wanted to record The Darkness by Tab Benoit. I called him to ask him if I could. He told me the background to the lyrics about loss in his family and we arranged this to suit the feel of the album. "

"I initially wanted an all-electric album without acoustic tracks. Joe and Josh proposed a chaotic, larger-than-life finale. This was the Rev. Gary Davis tune, Death Don't Have No Mercy. Steve Ray Ladson, a musician with Blind Boys of Alabama, helped arrange male vocal choir parts. They meticulously worked on vocals; it wasn't emotionally challenging until the finale. Singing it repeatedly, I thought, 'God, if I never hear this again, it's good.' Josh and Joe finally said, 'We're not making you sing this anymore.' It's dark and serves its purpose—the noise, chaos, and sudden stop signify the end, like saying, 'And now they're dead.'"

"Without Loving You - I wrote this. As soon as Laura was diagnosed for me, the grief started immediately. what am I going to do without you here, what will I do? She would say, you know you're going to be fine. You're going to take care of the girls. You're going to meet someone else. I thought, well, okay, there you go, Mike. That's the song, write that down. And so, I wrote it and that's what it started as and finished as a beautiful love song for my wife."

"Noone To Talk To (But The Blues); An old Louisiana blues tune, covered by Jimmie Vaughan. Joe chose this arrangement and just got me to listen to the lyrics and playing this song live, audiences seem to love it."

After such a truly deeply difficult recent history, I ask Mike about hitting the broad again: "Honestly, it was so welcome. Our lifestyle was me being on the road, playing. Even during Laura's chemo, she insisted I continue until she said otherwise. Having time off after her passing was exhausting, doing hospice and all. When I got the chance to play again, it was a lot harder touring with Albert last year, knowing she would die. But once she was gone, that looming doom wasn't there. Playing, I just wasn't thinking about anything. Fans tried to console me, but in reality, I was consoling them. It's okay. I let them know I'm okay. It's all right! I went to the Big Blues Bender in Las Vegas for a week. My goal was to let everybody hug me each day. They wondered how I was. I'd say, 'I'm not okay, but I've been crying for a year. It's your turn.' People don't know what to do; they think, 'I could never do this.' Of course, you could. You might not want to, but you'll have to face it. Everyone tells me I did a good job, but I don't know. I'm not a nurse. I don't know if I was right or wrong. I just tried my best."

"We go back on the road, have tours. My daughters stay with their mother-in-law. Many opportunities are coming, both musical and in other business ventures, including a nonprofit I'm starting this year. My goal is not to be on the road constantly, to be home with my kids and available for other work. We have a big tour starting in March, possibly another in the Fall. I'm pulling back a bit, focusing on higher-profile events and being available for my kids. Gulf Coast Records is still a big part of my legacy, and I'm deeply involved, ensuring it remains significant. Somewhere down the line, there'll be another Blood Brothers studio album. I have no idea when that'll be. I don't know if that's right. I'm trying to leave us plenty of space. Yeah, he can go tour and do his thing and I can tour and do my thing, you know? But that's definitely something we'll continue to do!

Life Is Hard is out on Gulf Coast Records on February 23rd.

EMMA WILSON

MIDDLESBORO, MEMPHIS AND MUSIC CITY

FOSTEX
T40RP

Stephen Harrison John Langford, Steve Roberts

From gigging in small clubs around her native North East, Yorkshire, and surrounding areas, Emma Wilson's life took a dramatic turn after the release of her album, Wish Her Well. An unexpected phone call from legendary US PR guru Frank Roszak quite literally changed her professional life. A change in fortunes followed with Frank dispensing great advice. Then came lockdown. Emma used this time to writie and work on new songs. Before long, she was off to Nashville, followed by a Memphis recording offer.

"I was going to release Wish Her Well, I had all the files ready, but just before I released it my family and friends said that I should send it out to record companies just to see if anyone is interested in helping out. Then a guy by the name of Frank Roszak who had been following me for a while and had sent me the occasional message, got in touch. The upshot was, that I sent him the file of Wish Her Well and he sent me an email saying,' Emma, don't release this yourself, stop what you are doing right now, I want to introduce you to somebody.""

This, as I'm sure that you are aware, is one of those pinch-me moments. From Emma's point of view, this was the fruit of her labours. Chances like this don't come along often, but when they do, you go with the flow, seize the moment, and you breathe. And that is exactly what happened.

"So this was an email from someone that I don't really know,. I know of him, I know his background. Basically, this guy, based in California, is telling me not to release the album, which is something that I'm dying to do. He then introduced me to Johnny Phillips via email, saying 'this guy needs to hear this record.'"

The guy in question is Johnny Phillips, owner of Select-O-Hits in America, and you may well ask with a surname like his, is he related to anyone from Memphis who was famous for recording Elvis Presley? The answer to that is, yes, he is. The Memphis connection is there!

"So, because of Frank Roszak, I was introduced to Johnny Phillips, and Johnny Phillips signed me to release Wish Her Well. They took it up, distributed the CDs all over America. Then they hooked me up with Proper Music UK, who distributedit in Europe and Australia; so suddenly this album had a life. And the things that come with that are a bunch of people to handle everything - promotions, distribution, and on-hand to help me with any technical troubles I might have. Apart from that, you've got the whole Phillips family who are probably one of the most iconic Rock and Roll families in the world!"

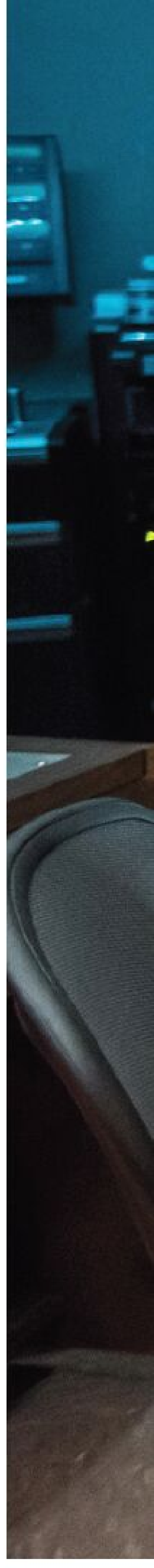
"Fast forward to last October, Johnny Phillips said to me, you need to make another album. You really need to capitalize on this and make a new record, but the problem was, I'd never sat down with another writer and written an album. If I was going to do another album, I wanted to work with someone I could collaborate with. My brother, Simon, is a writer, he'd done a lot of stuff back in the day, and he knew a writer by the name of Gary Burr who is a multiple award-winning Country and Western writer based in Nashville. He used to write with my brother about twenty years ago, so I'd met him when he was doing gigs in the UK. I kinda knew him a bit through my brother, so it was a case of who's the greatest songwriter that I know. Gary Burr."

"I sent Gary a polite email asking if he'd fancy write with me, waited a couple of days - thinking, oh, he'll be too busy - then I got an email saying, I've got a week free in January if you want to come to Nashville. So, off I went on a jet plane into the unknown, and that was the catalyst for Memphis Calling. When I arrived in Nashville, it was great because we'd had that little connection through my brother beforehand. So we weren't complete strangers, and lo and behold, he had a studio in his house. All the cards were falling very kindly for me. It was like a master class for me, he's such a good writer, we spent four days writing, such a magnificent experience."

After this songwriting collaboration with Gary Burr, I'm wondering, where does the next part of the story take us? Well, having been introduced to Johnny Phillips for the Wish Her Well album, Emma decided to do the most American of American things, get on a Greyhound Bus, and travel to Memphis to take in the culture, the ambience, and the all-round history of this iconic city, all it has to offer, and hopefully meet Johnny Phillips in person and see where that might lead.

"This was game time - this is it!"

"Whilst I was in America, I made a conscious decision to go and visit Memphis. I'd only had contact with Johnny Phillips via email, and we'd never even had a Zoom meeting. So I arrived in Memphis and got out of the cab outside Select-O-Hits, which is a big white building. It was almost like stepping into a movie, and I was a character in that movie, almost surreal. A week before, I'd been in Middlesbrough, then I found myself in Nashville, now I'm in Memphis. Johnny greeted me at the door, invited me inside, and behind him was a picture of Elvis with his uncle, Sam Phillips."



One can only imagine finding yourself in this situation, a pinch-me moment, chatting with a legend in the music recording industry, writing with a legend of the music industry, and walking into a building that is legendary within the music industry, Select-O-Hits is a legendary building in its own right, situated in the heart of Memphis, so I fully understand Emma describing it as akin to being in a movie. To top it all, Johnny Phillips blurted out an invitation to Emma: 'You should come back and record in Memphis.' When an opportunity like this presents itself, especially straight after writing songs with Gary Burr in Nashville, there is only one thing that you can do,. Grab it both hands and go for it. Which is exactly what this lass from Middlesboro did.," she quips with an easy laugh!

The Memphis album wasn't even an idea until I met Johnny Phillips. He then told me that they had just acquired the legendary Stax board (Sound Desk) that so many artists had recorded on. Twenty-four hours previously I'd been at the Stax Museum, standing in awe, and suddenly I was invited to record an album In Memphis using the Stax board. Johnny put me in touch with his cousin, Jerry Phillips, 'you can bring a band, you can bring a producer, bring whoever you like'. So I got the opportunity to go to the family owned 'Sam Phillips Recording' Studio, built by Sam himself in 1960 and they had just acquired the STAX board, this is not the SUN Studios where he recorded Elvis, but his own studio that has seen the likes of Al Green record there in recent years".

Having had such an amazing offer Emma now needed a band, and just as importantly, a producer, preferably someone who was well-versed in Memphis recordings, and musicians who met that same criteria. Scott Bomar, was the chosen producer. He'd worked on the Stax desk, taking a year to refurbish it. Then a group of musicians was added to the fray, Charles Hodges (Organ) Leroy Hodges (Bass), Archie "Hubbie" Turner (Piano), all 3 of whom were in the HI Rhythm Section, Steve Potts (Drums, Booker T and the MGs) Joe Restivo (Guitar), Kirk Smothers (Saxes) and Marc Franklin (Trumpet).

"Scott Bomar was so kind to me, very patient, showing me around the studio so that I could get a feel of the place, and eventually escorting me into Sam's office and inviting to me sit in his big leather chair, which I modestly declined thinking that would be a step too far. All of this helped me to settle in. The musicians treated me in exactly the same way, with no pressure. I could see as we recorded songs, that these legends of Memphis were enjoying the process, playing my songs. I'm getting

goosebumps right now just talking about it. We had two days preparing the songs; on day three, the musicians arrived, and that was the time I started to get nervous. This was game time. This is it."

Another highlight for Emma was the appearance of and meeting with legendary Memphis-based soul giant, Don Bryant. Bryant needs no introduction; a major figure as a performer and writer, wed to Ann Peebles, there are few of the soul greats he has not worked with. A truly huge figure in the music, Emma is still overwhelmed by his generous spirit and help. He co-wrote the track, 'What Kind of Love' with Scott Bomar, that features on the album.

Nerves aside, the resulting album is a treasure chest full of Blues, Soul, Gospel, and Boogie. It's a reviewer's dream to have an album like this land at your desk. Hard work and talent, that is what makes the journey worthwhile. A journey that started in Nashville, going to Memphis on a whim, collaborating with musical royalty, a journey that has put Emma Wilson on the map in the musical capital of America, and indeed the world, not bad for a girl from Middlesbrough who avidly listened to Aretha Franklin, Ann Peebles, absorbing everything along the way. And finally, to wind up in the home of Elvis Presley, walking the same streets, and walking those streets on merit. Memphis Calling is available now at www.emmawilson.net

CHEAT THE DEVIL

ANTHONY ROSANO

In the dynamic realm of blues and rock, Anthony Rosano stands as a captivating force, commanding attention with his soulful voice and commanding stage presence as the lead singer of the Conqueroos. With a voice that resonates with raw emotion and a passion for storytelling,

Colin Campbell Doug Hardesty

Rosano effortlessly weaves through the rich tapestry of blues, infusing each note with authenticity and intensity. As the frontman for the Conqueroos, Rosano leads a band that skilfully merges traditional blues with contemporary rock, creating a sound that is both timeless and innovative. With a magnetic energy that draws audiences into the heart of the music, Anthony Rosano is a powerhouse performer, leaving an indelible mark on the ever-evolving landscape of blues and rock music.

"My musical journey began with the influence of my family and the diverse range of music they exposed me to. My earliest memories are filled with the sounds of my grandfather's love for '50s rock and roll, my grandmother's eclectic taste from opera to country, and my uncle's passion for the Beatles. Even in the car, music was a constant companion, with my mom's preferences ranging from Chicago and Black Sabbath to Willie Nelson and Grand Funk Railroad."

He continues, "The turning point came when, at the tender age of four, I heard Led Zeppelin's "Black Dog." The raw power and energy struck a chord in me, and I knew that music was my calling. I vividly recall the moment in the car, captivated by the opening lyrics, "Hey, hey, mom, the way you move." It was a revelation, and from that point on, I was determined to pursue a musical path. Despite not having the means to indulge in music lessons or instruments immediately, I would eagerly browse through Christmas catalogues, marking guitars and drums on my wish list. It wasn't until I turned fifteen that I received my first guitar and amp as a Christmas gift. The experience of walking into a music store, picking out a blue Aria Pro II, and the accompanying gorilla amp was like a scene from a movie – a dream come true.

My stepdad played a crucial role in making this dream a reality, taking me to the store and sharing in the excitement. The support from my family, especially my mom, was unwavering. She eagerly awaited my return home with the guitar, as excit-

ed as I was about this new chapter in my life. While she recognised my passion for music, there were undoubtedly concerns about the practicality of pursuing a career in the industry. However, her support remained steadfast, dispelling any notions of conventional career paths. The gift of that first guitar marked the beginning of my musical odyssey, setting the stage for a lifelong pursuit of artistic expression and creativity."

Anthony reflects on his musical journey, starting with learning to play Judas Priest's 'The Sentinel' on guitar. He discovered power chords and quickly joined a band, with his brother Kenny and a drummer called Dominic playing in private parties influenced by the New British heavy metal scene. Self-taught, he occasionally eavesdropped on jazz lessons, but he mainly plays by ear. Although clueless about musical notation, his bandmates, who were formally trained, helped with technical aspects. We talked about his first gig experience in a small Long Island (His hometown) club, reminiscing about the modest pay and joking about the challenges of making money in the music business: "What's that old joke? If you want to make a million dollars in the music business? You start with two million."

When he was in his first band it got him thinking who they first listened to. After reading an article on Glen Tipton, Judas Priest guitarist,

he started listening to Peter Green who became a major influence on his approach to playing the blues likewise Rory Gallagher. He recalled his musical evolution, recognising Peter Green's influence on Judas Priest's 'Green Manalishi' and discovering blues through songs like 'Jumpin' at Shadows.' He reflected on his attraction to blues, citing Led Zeppelin's 'Since I've Been Loving You' and delving into research on Peter Green's blues roots in the Bluesbreakers. Recognising the British blues scene's distinctive loudness, he draws parallels to American Delta blues influenced by ambient sounds like horses. He noted the evolution from rural sounds in Delta blues to urban influences in Chicago blues and sees British blues, exemplified by bands like Free and Cream, as a post-war interpretation.

He explains the genesis of the Conqueroos like this: "I was playing in rock bands in New York, met my wife, then moved to Virginia. The band I was playing with fell apart. I was playing heavy music and listening to Robin Trower. I always incorporated blues in my playing with any band, but it was not the central focus of the band."

He describes a hiatus from music, selling equipment, moving to Virginia, and starting a family while being self-employed. Facing financial challenges during the 2008 recession, he sold his flooring contracting business and reluctantly took a clock-punching job. Disliking the work, he decided to pursue music seriously by forming the Conqueroos, diverging from cover bands to create original material. Indifferent to genre labels, he expressed a desire to emulate Rory Gallagher's approach, valuing live performances over hits. Influenced both musically and artistically by Rory, he emphasised the importance of conveying emotion in blues rather than fitting into a specific category. He alluded to a sort of prophecy he has in the band, relating to wearing bracelets:

"People wore these, saying what would Jesus do, I ask what would Rory do?" He praises his current bandmates, Kyle and Jake, as talented musicians tuned in to his artistic vision. They contribute to the songs he writes while providing dedicated support, creating a fulfilling musical dynamic. Originally a quartet, the Conquerors transitioned to a trio to maintain a guitar-centric identity. Initially, the addition of a saxophone aimed to diversify the sound, but it later became clear that keeping the focus on the guitar and songs was essential. The trio format aligns with a desire to relieve guitar pressure and concentrate on the overall musical composition. During COVID lockdowns, the speaker transitioned from playing large venues, like Madison Square Garden, to intimate garage acoustic sessions. Reflecting on the experience, he shares:

"I literally went from playing Madison Square Garden in New York City to putting my phone on a stand in my garage with an acoustic guitar." Despite the initial oddity, he expresses genuine love for acoustic performances and acknowledges the support of fans during live streams, saying, "People who tuned into a live stream helped put food on my table and support my family. I'm eternally grateful for that." Anthony realises the challenges faced during the pandemic, incorporating humour into his lyrics as a coping mechanism. He draws parallels between influences, citing both Bob Ross and Muddy Waters, highlighting the convergence of music and comedy in his artistic approach. Emphasising the importance of the human experience in music, he notes that despite the challenges, the relationship between the audience and artist remained, reinforcing the intrinsic connection in live performances.

Anthony described having a fluid songwriting process, stating: "I don't really have a process. I don't sit down and say, like, I'm going to write a song. Inspiration often strikes with a line or a sound, initiating the creative process. Rarely starting with guitar riffs, they are later applied to lyrical content. Lyrics play a crucial role, dictating the song's vibe." He highlights the spontaneity of ideas, saying, "Nine times out of ten, it's just, you know, I'll get an idea, or I'll hear something." The approach remains open to inspiration, connecting music's communicative power to being attuned to the world.

Anthony talks about his journey from a guitarist to a singer, emphasising a need for authenticity. He shared a crucial mindset shift, saying, "I may not be Paul Rogers, but I'm gonna be the best Anthony Rosano I could be," stressing the importance of being genuine. He describes his stage persona as an extension of himself, stating, "I'm just the same, what you see...."

Discussing collaboration with Tab Benoit on the new record, he notes their shared perspective on live recordings, stating, "We're gonna do it live... it's gonna be a perfectly imperfect representation of what the band sounds like." Despite facing unfamiliar audiences, and highlights the positive response, saying, "We were so fortunate, we did very well," acknowledging the generosity of the audience. He credits Tab's open-minded audience for embracing new musical experiences, and the importance of being open to discomfort on stage! "You've got to be truthful to yourself and your audience."

He talked about his diverse musical influences and highlights a preference for blues-based genres. He mentions exceptions, expressing admiration for bands like James Gang and Grand Funk Railroad, noting, "A lot of, you know, Power Trio stuff." The Stooges and contemporary blues artists like Kingfish and Gary Moore also find favour. He mentioned Anderson East and his R&B-influenced blues, adding, "But it's very bluesy, like, I love that." Foy Vance is another favourite, and he appreciates the bluesy sound in Anderson East's music, even with minimal guitar presence, stating, "It's a lot of b three and that kind of thing, which is great. I love that, you know. That brings it to a younger audience. What motivates me is the opportunity to live another day, create, accomplish things, and experience life, sharing those experiences with people."

Anthony talked about tracks from his newest release Cheat The Devil. He expresses satisfaction with the entire record, despite initial concerns about the unconventional approach, creating a live record in the studio. He values Tab Benoit's insistence on maintaining the live feel throughout, saying, "I'm happy that Tab held me to task on doing it." He acknowledges potential reservations about the unconventional recording style, but discussed the positive response from those who appreciate the authenticity, noting, "They really like the fact that it's live. There's no overdubs. This is the most organic thing that you could do."

I'm eager to explore opportunities to perform in Europe or any new places, always open to anything that puts us in front of new or familiar audiences. While I don't have a specific timeline for a new record, we're actively working on demos and writing songs, moving forward, and continuing to create.

Find Rosano online at: anthonyrosano.com

TINSLEY ELLIS
NAKED TRUTH

It's an iron law of blues music that any musician, whose recorded output is steeped in this wizened genre, will eventually record an entire acoustic album dedicated to this redoubtable medium. Such a move is heavily influenced by the commonly held belief that the Blues' 'Big Bang' moment began with Robert Johnson and his acoustic guitar. Frozen in photographic and recorded aspic, Johnson's large spidery hands continue to weave a deft web of musicality down the ages inspiring generations of players to attempt to draw muddy water from the same well.

Paul Davies   Darin Back

Tinsley Ellis does just this on his new release, Naked Truth. A prolific recording artist and dedicated road rat, Ellis has captured on record what he has been doing excessively over recent years, gigging solo with only his acoustic guitars accompanying him as he tells me about his urge to release an all-acoustic album: "Well, it's something I've always wanted to do and for a long time. I've been posting acoustic songs online through the awful pandemic era on a weekly basis. I called it the Sunday morning coffee song. And fans started asking if I ever thought about doing an acoustic album? So, it sort of spurred me on to do what I wanted to do as well." Tinsley continues: " I've always enjoyed doing specialty albums. I did a couple of live albums, one with The Heartfixers and one for Alligator that's sort of a specialty album. Then I did an all-instrumental album and those keep selling because they're different from the rest of my albums. I'm enjoying it so much that it's pretty much all I do right now."

Given his extensive solo acoustic touring, I ask this seasoned bluesman if the Naked Truth was recorded live in the studio? "Yes, it was actually recorded totally live and then mixed. I just set up a few microphones and played into them a lot of times without even having any headphones on." Mixed in with Ellis' original compositions are judiciously selected cover versions as Tinsley tells me: "The cover songs are what I've been doing live for a while now. In fact, the Leo Kottke folk song, 'The Sailor's Grave On The Prairie', I've been playing almost since it came out in the early 1970s. I've done that song many times and then there's the Muddy Water song, 'Don't Go No Further' (written by Willie Dixon), that's the sort of blues standard that I've played live. Mixing in those songs (including Son House's Death Letter Blues) I think kind of shows the roots of where I've been."

Ellis details the process of making Naked Truth: "I did it over the course of a year and a half. I started with Death Letter Blues which is a leftover from a session I previously did. I went out and road tested a lot of the songs until I thought I can do them better. So, I went back in a couple of different times to record the other eleven songs. I've been out on the road and had gotten better playing them and wrote a few more songs as well."

A prolific artist, I enquire whether he has a continuous flow of ideas for songs? "Yes, I have. In fact, I'm in my home studio right now and I've been writing electric and acoustic songs. I've been fortunate to have some people recording my songs over the years. John Mayall just released a version of my song 'A Quitter Never Wins' and Jonny Lang covered that song as well and sold over 2 million copies of it. That got my attention. Mike Zito has done a couple of my songs, he's got one coming out on his new album, which is produced by Joe Bonamassa. I'm very excited about that. He let me hear a little bit and it sounded fabulous."

With Naked Truth being self-produced, I enquire as to whether he is more comfortable working alone? "I've done that for a long time," he admits. "I've been blessed to work with some really great producers in my career." He adds: "Tom Dowd being the most prolific and famous one and Eddie Offord. I've done three albums with Eddie. Also, Brendan O'Brien who has produced a lot of the rock bands here in America... I've learned a little bit from each of those producers about what goes into it. Some of them were better at the mixing board, which I'm not that great at. Tom Dowd is not only great at the mixing board, but a real strong chooser of songs and arranger. I tend to work with people who are more technically oriented that can work the mixing board, mic stuff up and get it to sound right whereas I focus as a producer."

Given his wide musical interests, Tinsley opens about what the Blues means to him: "I've got a pretty broad definition of it. I kind of know what it is when I hear it. One definition of it would be music that has blue notes or notes that are bent to create tension usually on the G string of the guitar. I hear that and I go, 'Okay, that sounds blue'. You know, blue is a funny word it can mean a number of things. It can mean sad; it can also mean sexy and stuff like that. But there's no denying the fact that the Blues is an African/American art form."

Ellis contemplates where he fits in this venerated genre: "I've come to grips with the fact that I'm pretty much a rock and roller. Rock is my heritage and blues is my love. So, I mix what I can do with it when I want to." He adds a caveat: "I would feel somewhat of an impostor if I just described myself as a 'Blues Man'. I mean, there's so many blues musicians, but there's so few 'Blues Men' and 'Blues Women'. So, what am I? Well, I'm either a rock and roller or a blues rocker." Ellis suggests some comparisons: "The people that I feel I can kind of sound like would be Peter Green on a really good day, maybe. Certainly, Eric Clapton and Duane Allman are big influences on me, and I don't think they ever declared themselves strictly blues artists but, um, music changes and I guess I've done a lot of pretty hard rock and blues albums."

He offers a category for his current album: "This one is more of a Folk Blues type album, and I feel more comfortable doing that. I'm excited about performing and going all over with it and hopefully getting back over to the UK again before I'm too old to do it."

Ellis tells me if his recent excursions into acoustic only territory is tantamount to eschewing his electric live and recorded presence? "It's hard to say. I don't want to end my electric rock and roll career quite yet. But I really enjoy performing in this format. It's pretty scary. You know, if there's a lot of people out there like at a big festival, for instance, and I come out onstage, after a couple of rock and roll bands have played, with nothing but a chair and an acoustic guitar and there's a few thousand people out there and I've got to sit down and entertain them without drums or bass backing me up or amplifiers...it's like a weight backstage to go out there and play. I'm all by myself. It's like I'm heading to the guillotine or something like that. They're gonna chop my head off. It's like the executioner's come in and I'm being taken out to the gallows. So, it's scary. And travelling alone all-over North America is scary. It's just me and two guitars in a car."

Fear not, as that sounds like the Naked Truth and nothing but...

Q&A WITH

CASSIUS KING

Glenn Sargeant Supplied

When did you know that you wanted to work in the music industry?

"Ha… Probably when I was old enough to buy my first albums with the money I earned from my paper route.

I have to take you back to time long ago and far away called "The '70s" I only caught the latter half of them, but to me it was one of the golden ages for music. Not only were there new great albums being released every week, but there was more than half a decade of backlog to get caught up on.

My record store of choice was Music Plus, and you couldn't wait to see what the new releases were there, or what you might hear in the store, or who you might meet that would discuss their musical journey with you. As I got older, I realized what the "Plus" was. Music Plus had a backroom area to buy smoking devices…. if you know what I mean.

At home, there was always music playing. My Mom would be singing along and get us to sing along with her. I can specifically remember my turn to use the family's large cabinet stereo, put on the big ol' Koss headphones and be transported on a musical journey with Led Zepplin, Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd or Santana, and so many others. There was one album in particular that to me was a marvel, and also sparked my interest in recording and engineering, and that was "Frampton comes Alive." I mean there were other live albums, but in my headphones that album stood above the rest sonically and was an awesome album to boot. I learned later in life, as I went down the musical rabbit hole, Blues was the genesis of it all, and what I was really after."

Your debut EP release, 'Last Call For The Blues,' is an interesting collection of songs. How did you want to approach the making of it?

"We did it old school. We got an Air BnB close to the studio and everyone including the producer Dave Darling shacked up for five days with nothing else on our minds but making the best record we could. It is so hard to get musicians together unless you are doing a show or rehearsing for one. We had a busy local show schedule, so we were able to slip the songs into our rehearsals, and then hone them live. But it wasn't until we went into the studio with Dave that they really became something special."

Where did you record it and who produced it?

"I live in the inland area of Southern California and work a lot near a town called Temecula. I heard through the grapevine about a really great studio nearby (in Fallbrook) called Sonic-Rocket, so I called the owner, Cash, and he invited me over. One look told me this guy did it right! I'm a little bit of a gearhead and once I checked out the rooms, his racks and mic complement, I was completely sold. It's a little bit of an unknow gem well worth checking out (sonic-rocket.com). Cash also hooked us up with a great engineer Daniel Martin. Dave Darling vetted both, and it was on.

Dave Darling. What can I say about Dave. I have always been a big fan of his work. We met through a mutual friend when I was sound supervising a film about 14 years ago. He provided some great music for the film and we kept loosely in touch. Years later when I finally flipped the switch and started The Downtown Rulers, I started sending him snippets of songs I was trying to write, and he was always very encouraging. So when it came to our first record, it was a no brainer of who I wanted to produce it. All I had to do was bug the crap out of him and beg him until we found a hole in his busy schedule. I can't say enough of how Dave got the best out of all of us and really took the arrangements and put his stamp on them."

Do you have any interesting, funny or memorable stories from the recording sessions?

"Yes! Speaking of Dave, he is a bit of a renaissance man. We all took turns cooking dinner or breakfast. When It was Dave's turn, he also took it upon himself to make some hard-boiled eggs for snacks to keep in the fridge at the studio. You'd think hard-boiled egg, nothing special, right? But these were so perfectly cooked in such a specific way, they were the best hard-boiled eggs any of us had. The funny part is everyone was crazy about these eggs and just kept talking about them. I would walk by a conversation, and it would be "So how do you cook em' again?"

Was it a difficult EP to write?

"No, I wrote the lyrics and basic changes fall of 2022, and by the beginning of 2023 the band had them in working shape. I have so many song ideas rolling around in my head, it was nice to get a few of them out and make some room up there. The band took them and put them at the level they needed to be to performed live, and we went from there."

Do you have any favored stage instruments, effects, pedals?

"Yes, I play a two tiered Keyboard rig. The lower tier is one of my Yamaha 88 weighted keyboards. I like the action on Yamaha, so I have a couple. I use it for mainly piano, Rhodes, clav etc...The top tier is a Hammond XK 1 or XK5 hooked up to a Leslie 3300. I love the Hammond XK boards and through the Leslie it is more than legit. I love this rig as it gives me the flexibility to be a piano player or an organ player at will on any song. Sometimes you just let the spirit move you live You can bring it way down with a Rhodes and kick it up or even make it scream with the Hammond. Lots of fun."

Do you have any live plans for 2024 in the UK and Europe?

"Wow, wouldn't that be great? Currently no, as we don't have an agent in Europe yet… hint hint. I love the fans and the scene in the UK, and it would be an honor to come over. Right now, for this year, we are starting to be asked for festival appearances here in the States, which is awesome being the EP was just released."

How do you look after your voice?

"Honestly, I don't do much except breathing exercises. I was a music voice major in college. It was drilled into me by my vocal coaches how important it is, and how much of your voice and control come from your diaphragm. I remember one of them use to politely hit me in the stomach while singing and if you waivered, you got the diaphragm speech. Other than that, as I age, I am trying not to drink or smoke too much… nasty habits… lol."

In terms of the band, who is in it with you and when did you start performing and writing together?

"We started working together as a four-piece at the beginning of 2022. Prior to that, The Downtown Rulers featured my friend and blues mentor Teddy Lee Hooker on guitar, as well as The Brass Brothers, Dexter Thomas and Mike Richardson. Sadly, we lost Teddy during covid; that was a really hard time, personally. I knew I wasn't done yet. In fact, I felt a responsibility to keep going. It was then that Chris White (bass)

who was also Teddy's close friend, had reconnected with Chalo Ortiz (guitar) who was back in town. They worked together on several tours with Blind Dog Smokin.' Chalo suggested bringing in JR Lozano on drums and it was game on! I am extremely fortunate to have these guys in my band. They're all Grammy nominated or Grammy winning musicians, and are all very supportive of where I am in my musical journey; I learn so much every show we play together.

It makes me not only want to vibe with the audience, but also live up to the level of professionalism they bring to the table. Sometimes I just have this goofy grin on my face when performing because I am just so happy to be there. It's like, "Wow! I get to play with these guys!"

I absolutely love the EP artwork and I wanted to ask who designed/ created it?

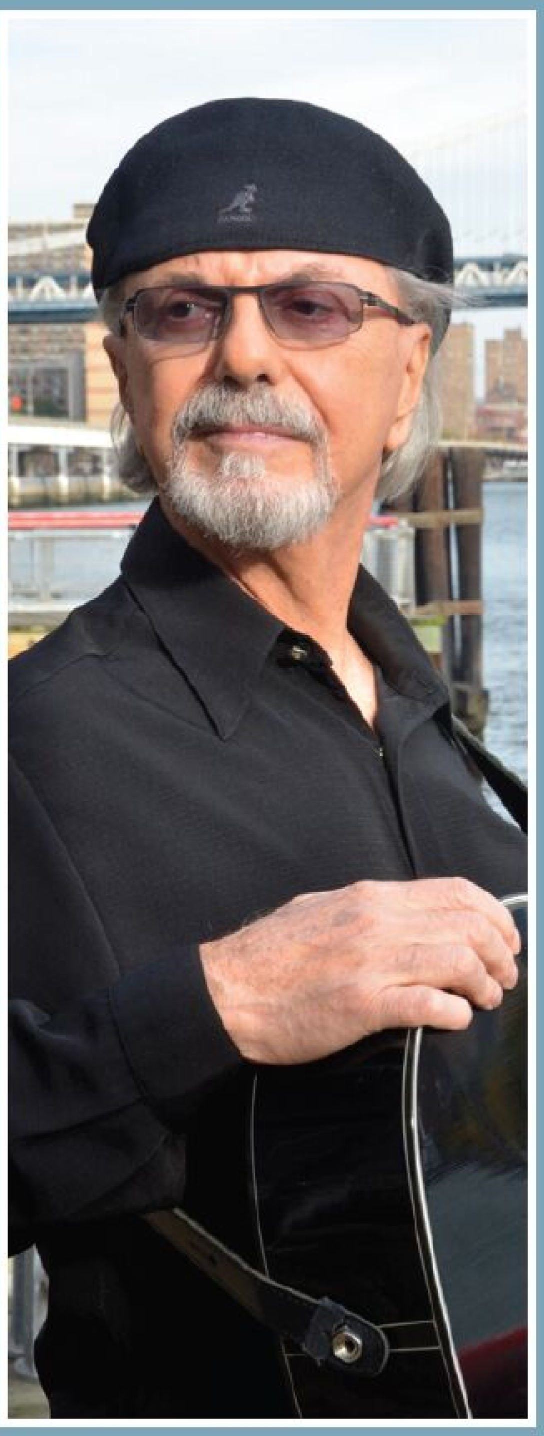
"Isn't it awesome? That was done by artist Jony Yoon. I had a rough concept idea, and the Kid took the ball and ran with it! I call him kid because he is my son-in-law. (Jony and my oldest, Alexandra, were married at the end of 2022.) Both my daughters, Alex and Ashley, are extremely talented artists. So, when it came to the artwork, I originally asked Alex first, and she suggested that I should use Jony. It was a great bonding experience for us. Plus, I think he upped his game a little to impress the old man!"

What makes Cassius King happy and what makes you unhappy?

"The Blues makes me feel so good" but wait, "The Blues make me sad." So I would have to say "The Blues" .... Final Answer! Other than that, a good ribeye steak, My wife Dawn's potato salad, a good bourbon and a chance to wake up and "Do It All Again. On the flip side, life's too short to be unhappy!"

DION

GIRL FRIENDS



Steve Youglvich   Supplied & David Godlis

Dion DiMucci is a music legend, probably the first global artist who became known by a single pronoun, years before Madonna or Prince and the like. Now in his mid-eighties he is about to release his third album in a four-year run of creative energy that has seen him produce possibly the best work of his long career. The new album is titled Girl Friends, and like Blues With Friends (2020) and Stomping Ground (2021) finds Dion working with a plethora of star guests but this time as the title suggests all talented ladies. As with the previous releases Girl Friends comes out on the Joe Bonamassa lead label Keeping the Blues Alive. What sets these guests filled albums apart from similar projects is the fact that these are all full of brand new original tracks of exceptional high quality written by Dion with input from his writing partner Mike Aquillina and tailored for each guest.

To set the scene let's take a brief look at Dion's history and why he is an important figure who links the past and remains relevant today. Born in the tough Bronx area of New York in 1939 into an Italian-American family, as a child he travelled around with his vaudeville entertainer father and his first musical hero was Hank Williams. In 1957 Dion recorded his first single with a backing band he had never met and had a minor hit with The Chosen Few. Encouraged by this he put together his own backing band The Belmonts. Their first single I Wonder Why went into the Billboard charts as did the two follow ups. This lead to Dion becoming invited onto The Winter Dance Tour Party alongside Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and Big Bopper which of course ended in tragedy. Dion & The Belmonts went on to have further chart success with A Teenager In Love and Where Or When but the band splintered when Dion had to battle heroine addiction.

However, despite this setback, by 1961, and now recording as a solo artist, Dion had his first real global hit with the timeless Runaround Sue, selling over a million copies and going gold. Follow up The Wanderer achieved similar success and was a hit again when re-released in 1976. Through the 70s and 80s Dion released a number of critically acclaimed singer songwriter albums and worked alongside the likes of Phil Spector, Bruce Springsteen (a huge fan), Lou Reed, Paul Simon and Dave Edmunds. His first real blues album, Bronx In Blue came out in 2006 and achieved Grammy nomination. Dion was inducted into The Rock N Roll Hall Of Fame in 2002.

I interviewed Dion about his previous two releases, so it was lovely to catch up with him again to talk about Girl Friends. We connect via Zoom and the first impression you get is how healthy and energetic this octogenarian is. He is on an artistic roll and wants to keep the momentum, the first thing he said to me when I mention the new album is: "This one took a bit longer to make, you know I'm not sure why, but the ladies are all so busy multi-tasking, they have a lot goin' on. It was easier with the guys! It was a lot of fun doing it and I felt relieved to finally get it completed, and people who are now hearing it for the first time are really excited about it so that fires me up again."

I tell Dion I felt Girl Friends was the perfect follow up to the previous two albums: "You know I had such a good time working with Samantha Fish, Ricky Lee Jones, Marcia Bal - I and I love Patti Scialfa, I sent her a track totally raw and she sent me back 48 tracks she had worked on around it, she produced the song effectively. What I'm experiencing with these projects is that people are giving me so much, sometimes more than they put into their own work. I have a video coming out soon with Danielle Nicole, when we sang the song I Aim To Please, and she sang above me and gave it so much that I had to go in and redo my vocals and the same thing happened with the video, she gives it so much energy. Its these great surprises inspire me. I know how to make good records but its great to hear what these other great artists bring."

I want to find out when Dion creates these great new songs if he has in mind who he wants on it while he writes, or does that come later?:

"Most of the time I just sing it as I feel it, I don't want it to peter out before the end. Then I get a word like maybe Soul Force, and lines that are like bragging lines. When I listen back I think who would best suit it. I don't just give them to anybody. For example, on Endless Highway in my head I heard a slide guitar on it, but then I thought of Randi Fishenfeld, who's a fantastic energetic violin player. She was thrilled with it, shes amazing, its all improvised. We had so much fun, like The Rory Block track, Don't You Want A Man Like Me, after we recorded it Rory

said, hey Dion you better not play this to your wife! I wrote An American Hero as a song about everyone pulling together for a better world and I thought Carlene Carter would be perfect for that. When I phoned her, she was like, yeah let's do this. With Christine Ohlman on Sugar Daddy, I imagined that as a sort of Jimmy Reed type thing, but she made it into a rhythm and blues which are such wonderful surprises, she called on her intuition. What I love with the blues is its so guitar driven, I embrace that so passionately, it's so expressive."

"A lot of the girls on this album I've long been a fan of. Like Joanne Shaw Taylor I love, and I finally got to meet her on the Blues Cruise and asked her to get involved and she was delighted, she's a real rocker. I'm really glad I've lived this long, you know when I was younger I would never ask for help cos I thought it's a sign of weakness, but Joe Bonamassa was the first one to say to me I'd like to play on that song, I said be my guest and what he did blew me away, it was totally off my radar, that was a song called Blues Comin' On. That sparked the idea of asking people to help me out. I approached Jeff Beck and he said yeah...wow man, Jeff Beck. I wanted to be a little different on this album, I thought it would be nice to have some dialogue with some of the girls, not on every track because I didn't want it to become repetitive, but on tracks like I Aim To Please or I Got Wise with Maggie Rose. Again, with Maggie when I was on The Blues Cruise I was walking through the atrium and heard this voice, it was Maggie Rose, I listened to her full set and she has such a distinctive voice, so much style you know that goes a long way. So, I wrote the song and instead of the guy being the player you know I wanted to reverse it and she was cool with that. She sings it so good I gave her most of the time."

"I had Chrissie Hynde lined up to appear on the album too, but she was so busy and booked up but I will do something with her in the future. The big regret I have, is I would've loved to have worked with Christine McVie. Her vocals are so relaxed but powerful is such a unique way. Very under rated."

Looking through the guests on the album, one name I wasn't familiar with was Valerie Tyson, singer on the track Stop Drop And Roll.

"Oh Valerie Tyson, she has a real Arethra vibe, she has her own band and is very popular here around Florida, all her shows are sold out and she kicks up a racket. She is such fun to be around, she just always makes the room feel better. She came into the studio and added different parts and absolutely made the song better."

"The Susan Tedeschi track, Soul Force, I love that song, the lyrics are so good sometimes I wish another Blues artist would pick up on it and do it. If only Albert King was still around, he could really do this justice, he was my favourite, guys like him, and BB didn't know how to do anything wrong. I love the way Susan sings so I'm little bummed that we didn't sing together but she knocked it out of the park with her playing."

Dion goes on to tell a little about growing up: "You know I was a bit weird as a kid growing up! I grew up in the Bronx and by the time I was eleven, I was a huge Hank Williams fan, I learned about 40 of his songs. By the time I toured with Buddy Holly and spent time with Waylon Jennings, I was singing the B sides to Hank songs, and he didn't even recognise them. I'm still in the same lane in life I've always been in, when I heard Hank or Jimmy Reed as a kid, they just brought me into a place of enchantment that didn't exist in my life, not like at home where my parents were arguing or the streets I grew up in. It was a place of salvation for me, and I've spent my life trying to recapture that sound or feeling and transmit it to others. You know the last three years have been like I'm under a spell. I feel I've written about 30 of the best songs of my life. I hope maybe I can be an inspiration to other people out there. Making these albums with Wayne in the studio has been joyful, it really works well."

When we had spoken previously Dion had told me about a musical based on his early career that he had been advising on, I wondered how that had progressed. Called The Wanderer it had debuted in New Jersey at The Paper Mill Theatre.

"Actually, we're looking at a Broadway venue for it later today! I can't mention the name yet but it's a lovely theatre and it's a perfect size too, not enormous but just right. Little Steven and I have been friends for years, he used to direct my band back in the 70s, he has such focus and concentration. Hopefully it'll premiere in the fall on Broadway."

With a book also in the pipeline 2024 looks like it's going to continue to keep Dion busy which is just how he likes it. The album is a superb follow up to Blues with Friends and Stomping Ground and I highly recommend you get on board.

Dion's new album "Girl Friends" is released by Joe Bonamassa's KTBA Records on March 8, and is available to pre-order from www.ktbarecords.com

THE DOORS ARE OPEN

AN INTERVIEW WITH DOORS GUITARIST ROBBY KRIEGER

Adam Kennedy Jill Jarrett

The influence of The Doors on contemporary music is unparalleled. The group's repertoire has stood the test of time, with their songs frequently played on the radio even in the present day. Whilst the band may have influenced many of their peers and amassed a legion of fans, the 60's rockers took a lot of inspiration from the blues.

If you delve into the band's back catalogue you will find interpretations of the delta blues number Crawling King Snake on L.A. Woman or Back Door Man by Willie Dixon on their eponymous album. Whilst original compositions such as the aptly titled Roadhouse Blues featured on the band's 1970 album Morrison Hotel.

When asked about the importance of blues music to the group, Doors guitarist Robby Krieger said: "It was big." The band's keyboard player Ray Manzarek catalyzed their interest. "Ray was from Chicago, so he had seen Muddy Waters, and he had gone to a lot of Howlin' Wolf shows and stuff like that. He had all these records from that period. We would sit and listen to them all the time," recalls Krieger. An alternate take of one of Dixon's blues recordings captured their interest. "This one song, Back Door Man, I had heard this version of it," he recalls. "Obviously, Willie Dixon had done it. But I heard this version from this guy, John Hammond Jr." Robby adds: "He did this version of Back Door Man that was totally different than the original. And I played it for the guys. And they said, wow, that's amazing. Let's do Back Door Man that way. So, when you hear Back Door Man, you should go back and look up John Hammond Jr's version."

In the present day, The Doors guitarist continues to release new music. The distinguished artist is preparing to unleash the eponymous debut album from Robby Krieger And The Soul Savages on the 19th of January. The record came to fruition when a group of friends got together for a musical rendezvous. "I have a studio in Glendale, and a couple of buddies of mine lived near there, and we started jamming together. That's pretty much how it started," explains Robby.

The quartet features notable musicians including: "Ed Roth, who's a keyboard player about town, and he's really a well-known session guy. He is playing with Annie Lennox and all kinds of guitar players like Joe Walsh," explains Robby. "We started just jamming and this friend of ours, who had just gotten over a pretty bad hospital stay, Kevin Brandon, he was hot to play because he had been stuck in this in a hospital for like a year." The latter also featured on Krieger's Grammy-nominated album Singularity. Rounding out the lineup is "Franklin Vanderbilt, who's Lenny Kravitz, US drummer. He wanted to get in on it," confirms Robby.

With the band in situ, the foursome got to work in a very organic manner. The band's eponymous release takes the group on an instrumental musical odyssey that explores soul-jazz, dirty blues, and the psychedelic rock roots of The Doors. "We didn't have any idea about it should sound like this or be like that," he said. "It really came from jamming. We just started playing, and a song would come out of it. I think it was more the guys who were playing, the four of us, who had a different idea on what this particular song should sound like."

Just like his days in The Doors, the gifted guitarist's distinctive style of slide guitar features on his new album. It has been said that this particular technique was something that resonated with Jim Morrison, so much so that the singer wanted Krieger to play slide on every song of the band's first album. "That's right. Although Ray did exaggerate that sometimes. But he really did like the slide that I was doing," confirms Krieger. "The first song we ever played together was Moonlight Drive, and I use the slide on that. And I really do think that that's what clinched it for me to be in the band."

Throughout his time with The Doors, Robby Krieger wrote or co-wrote classics such as Light My Fire, Love Me Two Times, Touch Me and Love Her Madly. Of course, these songs became big hits for The Doors. But did the band know that they were something special at the time? "We thought so," declares Robby. "One reason was because when we would play them live. We played at the Whisky a Go Go for six months straight. We were the house band, and we would play there every night. So, when we played our songs, we would notice which ones resonated with the audience."

Of course, some were more obvious than others. "We just knew that Light My Fire was the most popular one. And some of the other ones too. That really helps, to be able to play all those songs before we recorded them," said Krieger.

It goes without saying that Jim Morrison was a poetic lyricist. Working in the field of instrumental music is different, but in a good way for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inducted guitarist. "It's different because it doesn't have words. But with me, I always loved music, even more than words," explains Krieger.

As a guitarist, even in the Doors, writing lyrics wasn't at the forefront of Robby Krieger's agenda. "I never thought about writing words, until one day, Jim said to the three of us, he said, hey, we don't have enough songs. Why don't you guys write some words too? And so, I went home, and first I asked him, I said, what should I write about? And, he said, write about something universal. And that'll hold the test of time? And so, I said, ok, what's universal? Earth, air, fire, and water. You know, what's more universal than that? So that's where I got the idea for Light My Fire. And then there's some water songs. We just started playing Yes, The River Knows, that's a water song."

These days, it seems like Jim Morrison is a mythical character, preserved in the annals of music history via the band's songs, iconic imagery, archive recordings and vintage black-and-white videos. But what was the iconic frontman like as a bandmate, a friend, and a songwriting partner? "He was great to work with," confirms Krieger. "He seemed to love everything that I would come up with. And his words were so great. It was just easy to put music to it. I couldn't ask for a better writing partner."

With his new album wrapped, the doors are open for the legendary guitarist to explore opportunities presented by his new project. Robby Krieger is exploring his options with regards to touring his new album. "We're trying to get it together right now and make the plans. We're going to do some gigs here in the States all over. We'll just see what happens," he concludes.

The eponymous album from Robby Krieger and the Soul Savages will be released via The Players Club on 19th January 2024.

STONE COLD HANDS

AN INTERVIEW WITH SEAN RILEY

Colin Campbell Tanya Green

Singer songwriter and guitarist, Sean Riley, a New Orleans bluesman, encapsulates the soulful spirit of the city's musical heritage. With a voice resonating the Delta blues, and fingerstyle guitar playing, Riley delivers impassioned performances that transport listeners to the heart of juke joints. His music encapsulates the timeless essence of blues with contemporary relevance. Blues Matters caught up recently with Sean to discuss his new album, Stone Cold Hands.

Sean shared his journey into music, revealing a childhood fascination with the guitar and a pivotal moment at the House of Blues in Boston. Recalling the impact of seeing Matt Guitar Murphy perform, he recalls: "Just to see this guy, it really hit me."

This encounter sparked his love for blues music, an affection that endures, shaping his musical identity. "I still hear those songs, and I get excited for what that sound is." His early exposure to blues music stems from a CD purchase at the House of Blues at the age of fifteen. Despite initially perceiving the lyrics as merely fun, he later recognised their deeper, often dark significance. The allure of the blues lies not just in the lyrics but in the music itself.

"The music got me, and I guess that was around the time I figured that I really wanted to give this a try and see if I could make it happen." Coming from a non-musical family, he acknowledges the support received in terms of lessons and practice was encouraging. However, his musical journey is largely self-taught. An old guitar, a familial relic, became his learning tool. "I taught myself how to play, basically how to do it, and I continue to."

Reflecting on his early gigs, Sean reminisced about playing in coffee shops in his hometown and later landing a significant gig at Arlene's Grocery in the Lower East Side of New York. He distinguished his early style as a blend of blues, rock, and punk, heavily influenced by artists like Jon Spencer Blues Explosion, the Black Keys, and the White Stripes. When talking about his transition to playing more traditional Delta blues, he traces this evolution to his move ten years ago to New Orleans. Initially hesitant due to the reverence attached to the genre, he found confidence and comfort in the music scene.

"To me, it's kind of sacred music, and everything attached to it—the racial history, the whole history of it." Sean highlighted the impact of his relocation on his musical direction, crediting conversations with people and attending live performances as influential factors. "I felt more comfortable doing that music and the size of it," he notes, highlighting the gradual shift in his repertoire.

As a result, he began incorporating Delta blues into his performances, enriching his musical expression. This journey from a childhood love of the guitar to a self-taught musician with diverse influences culminates in a deep appreciation for the blues. His narrative intertwines personal growth, musical exploration, and a profound connection with the genre's historical and cultural significance.

"I fell in love with New Orleans," he shares, dismissing the notion that the move was solely due to New York City's expenses! Captivated by the city's jazz scene during early 2000 Jazz Fest visits, he immersed himself, playing gigs with friends. The allure extended beyond music to the city's aesthetic, food, and lifestyle. "I loved the feeling of it. I love everything about it."

The decision to relocate was timely, a shift from a graphic design/print career. Post-2008 economic downturn, freelancing couldn't sustain, prompting the move. "I started focusing on my music much more," he adds, making New Orleans the backdrop for a renewed artistic commitment. "I got a steady brunch gig, a very New Orleans thing."

Balancing studies across 4-5 venues monthly, he spans the city, noting the diverse scenes in uptown and downtown. "Different world from the Bywater," he remarks, enjoying the contrast between the younger, hipper crowd and the older audience. Performing country blues, he delights in watching both audience's dance. French Quarter and Bourbon Street gigs offer unique tourist experiences, adding to his mission of playing extensively around town, engaging diverse audiences with his music.

Describing his style, Sean proudly asserts: "I would say it's very New Orleans roots and blues music." Distinguishing himself from classic blues, he focuses on infusing positivity and energy into his sound. "Happy, driven blues," he labels it, highlighting the importance of making people dance. "It's the most important thing for me."

Balancing upbeat tempos with pensive lyrics, he creates a dynamic, audience-centric experience: "I like being the band as a jukebox and letting people have fun and watching them have a good time." His musical philosophy leans towards amplifying the joyous essence of blues, steering away from the melancholic. "I consider myself more Delta roots, kind of New Orleans blues, boogie-driven like Slim Harpo or Papa Charlie Jackson."

Acknowledging the city's jazz dominance, he notes the constant demand for blues from visitors. Despite a robust jazz scene, blues holds a special place, creating opportunities to fill the niche with authentic Delta-rooted sounds, enriching the diverse music scene.
We discuss his songwriting process, Sean prefers crafting lyrics first, drawn from personal experiences or intriguing angles. "I have a notebook for jotting down a ton of stuff." His approach blends structured practice with spontaneous exploration, letting the music evolve from feelings. "The music will kind of come first with a feeling, but then I'll kind of search and see the music theme and then write the song."

Motivated by the thrill of live performances, he expresses a newfound love for playing his original compositions, driving his desire to secure gigs: "Getting the gig lights a little fire in me to go and do more." Collaborating with friends like Dean Zucchero adds depth to his creative process, while the ultimate satisfaction lies in the connection forged with audiences during live shows. Influenced by blues legends like Muddy Waters and Howlin Wolf, the Rolling Stones, Willie Nelson, Guy Clark, and John Prine, he certainly has major musical influences. Despite admiration for Neil Young, his core influences are blues and country. Delving into Delta blues, particularly Robert Johnson's recordings, he finds joy and inspiration, shaping his dedicated work ethic and the desire for music to be a full-time commitment.

"I enjoy it more than anything else. It gets me excited to sit and play," he reflects, highlighting the perpetual influence of music in driving his creative pursuits. His career advice centres on honesty, simplicity, and hard work: "Keep it honest to yourself and have fun with it," he explains. Drawing from influences like John Fohl and Doctor John, he underscores the importance of a strong work ethic. "Keep working and make sure you don't take too much of a pay cut... it keeps me humble too."

Reflecting on the demanding gig schedule, he stresses the value of steady work. Ultimately, the advice encapsulates the balance of authenticity, dedication, and enjoyment, creating a harmonious approach to musical expression. "Be honest about what you're writing and feel good about that, and then be happy and have fun with it."

We turn to the new release and Sean has immense pride in his new album, stressing the importance of its originality and the enjoyable process of making it. Despite the expected time investment, there were no major setbacks, and each studio day brought pleasure. Collaborating with local and respected musicians, the

album, produced by his main partner Dean Zucchero, exemplifies their hard work within a budget. The live-cut approach, even capturing some vocals in the first take, adds excitement, reflecting a combination of diligent effort, minimal stress, and a seamless coming together of elements. The result is a New Orleans trademark sound, a source of genuine happiness and pride for the artist.

Sean's distinctive vocal style cuts through. He states a commitment to hitting the right pitch without mimicking iconic figures like Howlin' Wolf. Inspired by diverse influences, from country singers like Waylon Jennings to rock vocalists, Sean strives to maintain authenticity. His vocal style has changed with maturity, transitioning from a Kurt Cobain-like approach to refining a bluesy tone influenced by Muddy Waters. Despite vocal insecurities, he talks about the importance of vocal health during lengthy gigs, detailing efforts to improve his vocal range. The struggle to balance pitch, tone, and register, highlights the ongoing journey in mastering this craft.

Sean wants to tour more, particularly in Europe, having played gigs in Belgium, Paris, and Dublin. Investing in his latest record, he "hopes it boosts his profile and provide opportunities for more gigs". Success, for him, involves peer recognition, positive feedback, and playing for larger audiences. He aspires "to be so busy that turning down gigs becomes a possibility"

For further details see website:
facebook.com/seanriley-andthewater/

"be happy and have fun"

LIVE MUSIC

ERJA LYYTINEN

05 APR	THE CLUNY	NEWCASTLE
06 APR	VOODOO ROOMS	EDINBURGH
07 APR	CRESCENT COMMUNITY CENTRE	YORK
09 APR	THE 1865	SOUTHAMPTON
10 APR	THE HALF MOON	LONDON
11 APR	WATERLOO MUSIC BAR	BLACKPOOL
12 APR	EASTWELL VILLAGE HALL	MELTON MOWBRAY
13 APR	HRH BLUES FESTIVAL	SHEFFIELD
14 APR	THE LAMP TAVERN	DUDLEY

WHEN RIVERS MEET

27 APR	THE BROOK	SOUTHAMPTON
28 APR	THEKLA,	BRISTOL
02 MAY	GORILLA,	MANCHESTER
03 MAY	ST LUKES	GLASGOW
04 MAY	BRUDENELL SOCIAL	LEEDS
09 MAY	EPIC STUDIOS	NORWICH
10 MAY	RESCUE ROOMS	NOTTINGHAM
11 MAY	THE GARAGE	LONDON

KIRA MAC

25 APR	BRUDENELL SOCIAL CLUB	LEEDS
26 APR	ACADEMY	MANCHESTER
27 APR	ORAN MOR	GLASGOW
28 APR	ANARCHY BREW CO	NEWCASTLE
02 MAY	RESCUE ROOMS	NOTTINGHAM
03 MAY	THE 1865	SOUTHAMPTON
04 MAY	KK'S STEEL MILL	WOLVERHAMPTON
05 MAY	WATERFRONT STUDIO	NORWICH
08 MAY	LOST HORIZON	BRISTOL
09 MAY	ARLINGTON ARTS	NEWBURY
10 MAY	UNDERWORLD	LONDON
11 MAY	UNDERGROUND	STOKE

JOE BONAMASSA

04 APR	ROYAL ALBERT HALL	LONDON, UK
05 APR	ROYAL ALBERT HALL	LONDON, UK

JOOLS HOLLAND

01 DEC	SEC ARMADILLO	GLASGOW
02 DEC	SEC ARMADILLO	GLASGOW
06 DEC	FORUM	BATH
07 DEC	BEACON	BRISTOL
08 DEC	PAVILLIONS	PLYMOUTH
09 DEC	BRIGHTON CENTRE	BRIGHTON
15 DEC	SYMPHONY HALL	BIRMINGHAM
16 DEC	SYMPHONY HALL	BIRMINGHAM
17 DEC	FIRST DIRECT ARENA	LEEDS
20 DEC	BARBICAN	YORK
21 DEC	UTILITA ARENA	CARDIFF
22 DEC	02 APOLLO	MANCHESTER

ROBIN TROWER

28 MAY	ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL	LONDON
30 MAY	GLASSHOUSE INT. CENTRE	GATESHEAD
31 MAY	HOLMFIRTH PICTUREDROME	HOLMFIRTH

BRAVE RIVAL

02 FEB	BLACKPOOL WINTER GARDENS '24	BLACKPOOL
04 FEB	PIZZA EXPRESS JAZZ CLUB	LONDON
06 FEB	THE TUESDAY NIGHT MUSIC CLUB	COULSDON
24 FEB	BARNOLDSWICK MUSIC & ARTS	BARNOLDSWICK
25 FEB	BRUDENELL SOCIAL CLUB	LEEDS
27 FEB	RAMSGATE, RED ARROW	RAMSGATE
01 MAR	LEGENDS OF ROCK	GREAT YARMOUTH
30 MAR	NANTWICH, CIVIC HALL	NANTWICH
05 APR	BRIGHTON, CONCORDE	BRIGHTON
06 APR	THE STABLES	WAVENDON
26 APR	LIBRARY THEATRE	LEIGHTON BUZZARD
27 APR	LEAMINGTON SPA	TEMPERANCE
11 MAY	BLUES RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL	STOCKTON-ON-TEES
12 MAY	LINCOLN BLUES RHYTHM & ROCK	LINCOLN
16 MAY	DAVID EVANS COURT THEATRE	TRING
24 MAY	SOUTHAMPTON, 1865	SOUTHAMPTON
25 MAY	LONDON, DINGWALLS	LONDON

KRIS BARRAS

06 APR	THE FOUNDRY	TORQUAY
12 APR	ENGINE ROOMS	SOUTHAMPTON
13 APR	KK'S STEEL MILL	WOLVERHAMPTON
14 APR	MANCHESTER ACADEMY 2	MANCHESTER
17 APR	THE GARAGE	GLASGOW
18 APR	BOILER SHOP	NEWCASTLE
19 APR	ROCK CITY	NOTTINGHAM
20 APR	ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL	LONDON
15 AUG	CHEPSTOW CASTLE	CHEPSTOW

GA-20

01 FEB	THE BROOK	SOUTHAMPTON
02 FEB	THE BOURNE MUSIC CLUB	CHISLEHURST
03 FEB	NORWICH ARTS CENTRE	NORWICH
04 FEB	UK BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FEST	BLACKPOOL

JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR

17 FEB	ROYAL NORTHERN COLLEGE	MANCHESTER
18 FEB	QUEEN MARGARET UNION	GLASGOW
19 FEB	CITY VARIETIES MUSIC HALL	LEEDS
21 FEB	THE FIRE STATION	SUNDERLAND
22 FEB	INDIGO @ THE 02	LONDON
23 FEB	WULFRUN HALL	WOLVERHAMPTON
25 FEB	THE WATERFRONT	NORWICH
26 FEB	DE LA WARR PAVILION	BEXHILL
28 FEB	APEX	BURY ST EDMUNDS
29 FEB	PALACE THEATRE	SOUTHEND

BEX MARSHALL

26 FEB	MIDNIGHT SPECIAL BLUES CLUB	CAMBERLY
09 MAR	ST MARYS SESSIONS	DORKING
13 MAR	CLUTHA	GLASGOW
15 MAR	HOWLING WOLF	GLASGOW
19 MAR	THE WROTHAM ARMS BROADSTAIRS	KENT
08 SEP	DARLINGTON BLUES FESTIVAL	DARLINGTON
13 SEP	BLUES ON THE BAY	STOCKTON ON TEES

EMMA WILSON

02 FEB	WIRRAL BLUES CLUB THORNTON	HOUGH
11 FEB	GEORGIAN THEATRE	STOCKTON-ON-TEES
22 FEB	CC DE STEIGER MENEN	BELGIUM
16 MAR	BOWNESS BAY BLUES	BOWNESS
17 AUG	GT. NORTH EAST R&B WEEKEND	NEW MARSKE
14 SEPT	CLAYPATH DELICATESSEN	DURHAM
05 OCT	DISEWORTH BLUES CLUB	DERBY
13 OCT	TYNE BAR	NEWCASTLE
22 NOV	LEEDS BLUES CLUB	LEEDS

FESTIVALS IN 2024

LOTS TO CHOOSE THIS YEAR

UK BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL

FEB 2-4

Winter Gardens : Blackpool

www.wintergardensblackpool.co.uk

HRH BLUES FESTIVAL

APR 13-14

O2 Academy : Sheffield

hrhblues.com

UPTON BLUES FESTIVAL

JUL 19-21

Upton Upon Severn, Worcestershire

upton-blues-festival.co.uk

THE GREAT BRITISH RHYTHM & BLUES FESTIVAL

AUG 23-25

The Pendle Hippodrome, Lancashire

www.bluesfestival.co.uk

ALL INFORMATION CORRECT AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRINT. PLEASE CHECK WITH THE VENUES BEFORE TRAVELLING OR BOOKING HOTELS

RMR TOP 50

ROOTS MUSIC REPORT'S BLUES ALBUM CHART

POS	ARTIST	ALBUM	LABEL
1	TOM HAMBRIDGE	BLU JA VU	QUARTO VALLEY
2	COCO MONTOYA	WRITING ON THE WALL	ALLIGATOR
3	PETER VETESKA & BLUES TRAIN	FULL TILT	BLUE HEART
4	MITCH WOODS	FRIENDS ALONG THE WAY (DELUXE EDITION)	CLUB 88
5	GHALIA VOLT	SHOUT SISTER SHOUT	RUF
6	BOBBY RUSH	ALL MY LOVE FOR YOU	DEEP RUSH
7	ROBERT FINLEY	BLACK BAYOU	EASY EYE SOUND
8	BLACK PUMAS	CHRONICLES OF A DIAMOND	ATO
9	NICK MOSS	GET YOUR BACK INTO IT! (FEAT. DENNIS GRUENLING)	ALLIGATOR
10	SUE FOLEY	LIVE IN AUSTIN VOL. 1	SELF-RELEASE
11	THE DIG 3	DAMN THE RENT	SELF-RELEASE
12	CHRIS BEARD	PASS IT ON DOWN	BLUE HEART
13	TERESA JAMES & THE RHYTHM TRAMPS	ROSE-COLORED GLASSES VOL. 2	BLUE HEART
14	JOEL ASTLEY	SEATTLE TO GREASELAND	BLUE HEART
15	JOE BONAMASSA	BLUES DELUXE VOL. 2	J&R ADVENTURES
16	SELWYN BIRCHWOOD	EXORCIST	ALLIGATOR
17	EMMA WILSON	MEMPHIS CALLING	SELF-RELEASE
18	CHRISTONE "KINGFISH" INGRAM	LIVE IN LONDON	ALLIGATOR
19	JOHNNY RAWLS	WALKING HEART ATTACK	CATFOOD
20	D.K. HARRELL	THE RIGHT MAN	LITTLE VILLAGE
21	JOYANN PARKER	ROOTS	HOPELESS ROMANTIC
22	ARLEN ROTH AND JERRY JEMMOTT	SUPER SOUL SESSION!	BLUE HEART
23	FRANCK L. GOLDWASSER	WHO NEEDS THIS MESS!!??	CROSSCUT
24	THE CASH BOX KINGS	OSCAR'S MOTEL	ALLIGATOR
25	JASON RICCI & THE BAD KIND	BEHIND THE VEIL	GULF COAST
26	DUKE ROBILLARD	SIX STRINGS OF STEEL	M.C.
27	CASSIUS KING & THE DOWNTOWN RULERS	LAST CALL FOR THE BLUES	BIG EAR AUDIO
28	WILLIE J. CAMPBELL	BE COOL	BLUE HEART
29	BOB CORRITORE	SOMEBODY PUT BAD LUCK ON ME	VIZZTONE
30	GRAINNE DUFFY	DIRT WOMAN BLUES	BLUE HEART
31	CEDAR COUNTY COBRAS	HOMESICK BLUES	SELF-RELEASE
32	CHRIS YAKOPCIC	LIVE AT THE HIDDEN GEM	YAKO
33	LARRY TAYLOR AND THE TAYLOR FAMILY	GENERATIONS OF BLUES: WEST SIDE LEGACY	NOLA BLUE
34	BLACKBURN BROTHERS	SOULFUNKN'BLUES	ELECTRO-FI
35	MIKE BOURNE BAND	CRUISIN' KANSAS CITY	BLUE HEART
36	B'EE	WHAT'S IT GONNA B'EE	MAD EARS PRODUCTIONS
37	EDDIE 9V	CAPRICORN	RUF
38	GUITAR JACK WARGO	THE NEW NORMAL	SELF-RELEASE
39	MARCEL SMITH	FROM MY SOUL	LITTLE VILLAGE
40	MONSTER MIKE WELCH & MIKE LEDBETTER	NOTHING BUT TIME	GULF COAST
41	BOB MARGOLIN	THANKS	VIZZTONE
42	ALEX LOPEZ	LOOKING FOR A CHANGE	MAREMIL
43	PAT MCDOUGALL	IN THE KEY OF SORRY	MOUSETRAP
44	MISTY BLUES	OUTSIDE THE LINES	GUITAR ONE
45	REVEREND FREAKCHILD	SONGS OF BEAUTY FOR ASHES OF REALIZATION	TREATED AND RELEASED
46	DAVE KELLER	IT'S TIME TO SHINE	TASTEE TONE
47	TOM BUENGER	BLUES FROM CAUCASIA	SELF-RELEASE
48	SANDY CARROLL	LOVE ON IT	BLUE HEART
49	KYLA BROX	LIVE AT KÖNIZ CASTLE	PIGSKIN
50	LITTLE G WEEVIL	IF I MAY...	SELF-RELEASE

BIG BLUES REVIEWS

EMMA WILSON

MEMPHIS CALLING

Independent

What do you get when you have a female singer originating from Middlesborough, Johnny Phillips, who owns Select O Hits in Memphis and is distributing Emma's music out of Memphis, and some of the finest musicians from Memphis, and the original Stax recording console? You get an album that reaches deep into your soul and an eternal feeling of happiness. Nine songs that accentuate the very essence of Blues and Soul, the Memphis sound and feel bursting out of the speakers like a tidal wave. The opening track, A Small World, co-written by Emma and Gary Burr, has all the vibe of Memphis and Stax, such a soulful song, brilliantly delivered by Emma Wilson. The musicians on this album are steeped in Memphis musical folklore, they come with exceptional resumes, Booker T

> *an album that will be talked about for a very long time*

And The MGs, Greg Allman Band, The Bo-Keys, and Cyndi Lauper. But this album is much more than having stellar musicians in an iconic studio, this album is all about the voice and songwriting acumen of Emma Wilson. What Kind Of Love, Ft, Don Bryant is a prime example of great writing, great harmonies, and wonderful vocals. I'll See You In The Morning, co-written with the legendary Terry Reid, brings out a more soft and subtle aspect of Emma's voice, a smokiness to the delivery. There are four covers on the album, Water, originally recorded and written by Steve Cropper and Eddie Floyd, a magnificent tune, you could be forgiven for thinking that this would be a like-for-like rehash of a classic song, but far from it. When an artist does a cover, you want them to bring something else to the table, Emma Wilson brings the cutlery, condiments, and the main course to this musical feast. The same can be said for her rendition of Hoochie Coochie Man. I think I'm correct in saying that I've not heard this song performed by a woman before, It's part of the DNA of Muddy Waters, and quite rightly so, but Emma Wilson demonstrates just how bloody good she is. Emma Wilson has gone to Memphis, hooked up with legendary musicians and producers, and left us with an album that will be talked about for a very long time.

STEPHEN HARRISON

11 GUYS QUARTET

11 X 11

VizzTone

Hands-up from me, as I know absolutely nothing about these four guys apart from what I can glean from the Internet. So it would appear that they first began to play together around forty years ago in the bars and clubs in the Boston Mass area. Their collective love of Blues and Rock proved to be the foundation for their on going friendship. Initially known as 11th Hour Blues Band over the subsequent years the guys have played in countless bands periodically coming together to have a good time just making music together. So here we are at the end of 2023, with the pandemic thankfully mostly behind us, with the release of this new album. Not exactly prolific in terms of output, this being only their third since 1985, in fact it comprises eight singles laid down during the pandemic plus three new cuts. So what do you get for your money? Well this is simple rollicking, mostly instrumental Blues, driven along by a solid rhythm section of Chuck Purro drums and vocals, Bill Coach Mather bass underpinning Paul Lenart guitar and vocals plus Richard Rosenblatt harmonica. The overall sound of the album doesn't really change much from the gritty, swampy Blues perhaps you would expect. Sure the tempo of the cuts, all originals, varies keeping the freshness alive. Truly it is hard to select out favourites but I really enjoyed Possum Blues, Black Cat Bone, Texicali Mojo (which I think was released as a single in the Sates) and He Ain't Got You. So, if you like your music straight-ahead with zero frills then do check this collection out.

GRAEME SCOTT

ADRIAN SHAW

A DARK REFLECTION

Blue Matter Records

Born in London in the mid 40's, Adrian got into music from an early age watching bands and artists at famed London venues throughout the early 60s. By the mid-60s Adrian was playing in bands such as White Rabbit, J.P Sunshine and others. At the end of the 60s he teamed up with singer, guitarist "Rustic" Rod Goodway forming Rustic Hinge and eventually Rod & Ade moved to Bristol and formed darlings of the underground scene, Magic Muscle. By the mid-70s he had played bass with Mike Moorcock's Deep Fix, Ade was well-regarded by the guys in Hawkwind, and after Lemmy departed their ranks, they asked him to join. For the next three years Ade travelled the world and recorded albums with them, but after becoming a Father Ade wanted to stay at home and watch his son grow up, so took the unlikely step of becoming a London bus driver. In the mid-80s, Ade was involved in a reunion tour of Magic Muscle, and when guitarist Huw Gower could not make the UK shows Ade asked his friend Nick Saloman of the Bevis Frond to help out. As a result of this, Ade became the bass player of the Bevis Frond spending the next thirty years playing in the band during which time Ade has also recorded several solo album., Due to personal reasons Ade no longer tours or gigs, but this has not stopped him from recording this new album, with Ade playing all the instruments bar a couple of guest appearances from Nick Saloman and Bari Watts, A Dark Reflection consists of eleven brand new songs ranging from the out and out psychedelia of A Golden Future, Fever Dream and A Dark Reflection. Take Your Time and Remember Me, have an early Floyd laidback psychedelic vibe, with the rockier sounds of, The Point Of No Return, Didn't See It Coming and Remember Me to the lilting balladry of Conflicting Views, one for the psychedelic rockers amongst us.

SHIRL

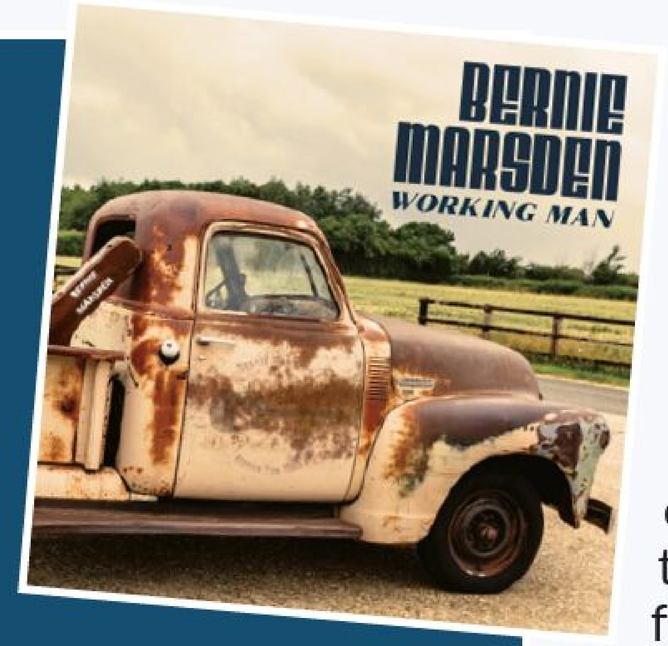
AL BASILE

B'S TIME

Sweetspot Records

This career retrospective showcases seventeen remixed and remastered songs from his solo releases. A singer-songwriter and cornet player, Basile enlisted top-notch musicians, including members of Roomful Of Blues and Duke Robillard's bands. Duke's creative guitar skills are prominent in most tracks. Basile's music fuses R&B, blues, jazz, and standard vibes, featuring smooth vocals and abundant cornet skills. He wrote sixteen of the seventeen songs. The album opens with a big band feel on You Showed Me Something, echoing Ray Charles tones. Duke's guitar prowess shines in I

BERNIE MARSDEN



WORKING MAN (SPECIAL EDITION)

Conquest Records

Bernie marsden sadly left the stage a few months ago but his astonishing talent, strength and stature remain firmly fixed in the UK and world blues firmament. Here, with his old label, Conquest, we have a remarkable release of some of the great man's finest

> *an album blues lovers will simply love in every way!*

moments. Tracks range across his career and kick-off with the aptly named, Being famous – a thought that I'm sure would have Bernie smiling now. The title track, Working Man, is a fabulous, commanding number that highlights Marsden at his finest – and reflects his own life in so many ways as a hard-working, in demand blues-rocker and journeyman performer. Of course, alongside these tracks, which also explores a taste of his famed Whitesnake days, Working Man also includes a raft of previously unreleased material, all stamped to perfection by the late great. In reality, this is a release that covers all of Bernie's broad bases, from classic traditional Delta to Chicago-sounds and his own irreplaceable talents as both writer and performer. Ain't No Love in the Heart of the City is another outstanding effort and it's perhaps perfect to find the closing track is one of those hugely popular songs from Robert Johnson's cannon – a path well-trodden and totally mastered by the late Marsden, Come on in My Kitchen. This is an album that blues lovers will simply love in every way!

IAIN PATIENCE

Really Miss You, while the Blind Boys Of Alabama join for the gospel-infused Lie Down In Darkness. Tickle My Mule carries an upbeat vibe with Bruce Katz on piano and Mike Welch's guitar joining forces to lift the tone. Drive Me Darling feels like an old Beatles song. Hooray For Me (and to Hell with You) balances melancholy with honky-tonk piano and strummed acoustic guitar. B.D., an instrumental with a Latin beat, features Paul Odeh's piano and Al's cornet solo. The slow dance tune, Can I Trust You With A Kiss? incorporates emotive organ and poignant horns. Make A Little Heaven features Sista Monica's gospel energy. Sleeping Beauty, charms with Tom West's piano and organ. While We're Dancing offers cocktail jazz measures. The retrospective concludes with the upbeat 1.843 Million, a tale of a botched robbery, featuring Robillard's guitar trademarks. This compilation celebrates Al Basile's diverse musical journey, highlighting his talent and collaboration with accomplished musicians across various genres.

COLIN CAMPBELL

ALEX LOPEZ

LOOKING FOR A CHANGE

MAREMIL

Not a name I am familiar with, but Alex Lopez is worth looking further into as this is his seventh album, and if the previous six follow the pattern of hard-edged Blues with a strong British R&B feel, then I want to hear them. A three-piece outfit, my favourite number, with Alex on guitar and vocals, Steve Roberts on bass and Kana Leimbach on drums, the band play it hard and fast, plenty of skill on show and their influences firmly sewn on to sleeves. Opening track Train has a strong funk in the back line and Lopez vocals have more than a touch of Stevie Marriot about them. That leads into Whiskey Covered Woman which calls up the ghost of Zeppelin past. It's not that they are copyists, just acknowledging where their music comes from. Nine tracks are originals plus a version of Cream's Politician with Steve Roberts on vocals which is a fine version without adding anything to Cream's or Jack Bruce's versions. Spanish Blues is the softest number on the album, and it shows another side of their talents with an expansive sound and gently passionate vocal, great bassline carries the track. Wild As The Wind is probably my favourite number showing a all three skills and telling a story that is as old as the Blues. It's an excellent album, nothing spectacular but some fine playing and worth more than a cursory listen.

ANDY SNIPPER

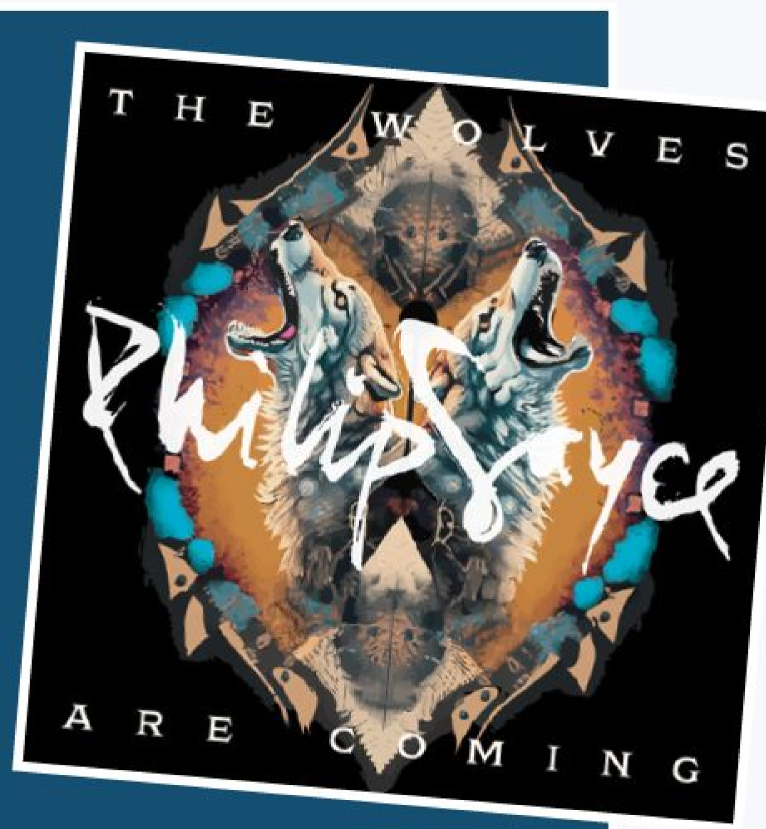
BASKERY

V: END OF THE BLOODLINE

Mother Tarantula

These three sisters, Greta, Stella, and Sunniva Bondesson, from Stockholm in Sweden have achieved the seemingly impossible, not only by getting a record deal in the USA around a decade ago but much more recently, well, post pandemic, close to the end of 2023, by creating this wonderful set of totally authentic sounding if rather individual Americana. This is their fifth studio album, and was recorded, somewhat improbably, in Devon! There are elements of Tom Petty maybe, but more strongly still a rootsy, often country or perhaps more accurately country-rock approach, and all with immaculate, beautiful harmonies, and some fine, big-sounding backing. The sisters played all the instruments, based around banjo and guitar – try Pity Kisses with its traditional and extremely catchy vintage sound, or the frantic Miss America, with its blues slide guitar very prominent, taking an almost Muddy Waters styled instrumental break. The only exceptions to the ladies playing all their own backing are the tracks Wolf Hook and Little Lonesome Hate, on which Seth Lakeman also plays viola, his brother Sean produces this album. There is a Robert Ward flavoured guitar break on the southern styled ballad The Curse, and appearances with the likes of Gary Clark Jr. and Johnny Winter maybe help to explain the blues aspect of their music, at least partially. It is not the prime factor in the mix here, but it is certainly there. So, readers with a leaning towards

PHILIP SAYCE



THE WOLVES ARE COMING

FORTY BELOW RECORDS

Listeners of (ahem!) a certain age, will find fond memories of the straight-out-of-the-traps aural attack combination of blues guitar, vocal, and bass, all combining together to threaten your fillings with the sheer force of Oh! That Bitches Brew, the first track of Philip Sayce's new album. There is even a hi-hat-cymbal backed moment of sonic trickery nodding to Whole Lotta Love on the way through. But this is no copyist, or slavish legend-follower, Sayce has his own unique voice, and sound, and this album is all the more exciting for that. By the time we get to Babylon Is Burning, the musical identity of the band is beginning to coalesce around a signature sound of bass following guitar note for note – unsurprising since Sayce undertook both lead and bass guitars duties in the studio. Your Love shows that Philip Sayce has a wah-wah pedal in his tool box, and he likes to use it, but like everything else on the album, his addition of effects is carefully controlled, always enhancing the overall sound, and never committing the cardinal sin of over-indulgence simply for the sake of showing off. It's Over Now is probably about as 'stripped back' as

> *A talent that is going to rise very far very quickly*

Philip Sayce likes to get, and the thunderous drums, bass, and guitar provide a more than adequate bed for Sayce's soulful and heartfelt vocals to lie on. The instrumental Intuition carries some delicately expressed and beautifully played solo blues, the mantle of the late Garry Moore is in safe hands with material like this. All in all, this album manages to tread a difficult line with skill and grace. Its influences are proudly worn, and will awaken appreciative memories for those who recall the halcyon days of seventies blues rock, but there is a modern sheen in the vocals and production that make this absolutely a new approach to blues rock music for the current generation. Sadly, I missed Mr Sayce's autumn live dates – this album means I absolutely will not miss his return. A talent that is going to rise very far very quickly. Catch him while you can. Philip Sayce's new album "The Wolves Are Coming" will be released by Atomic Gemini/Forty Below Records on February 23 via www.philipsayce.com and www.fortybelowrecords.com.

ANDY HUGHES

NEW ALBUM OUT NOW

RANDYLEERIVIERE.COM

MIKE ZITO
LIFE IS HARD

Gulf Coast Records

The latest release from Mike Zito is the best body of work he has made. As he said himself in an interview for Blues Matters, it is a work of art. There are so many layers to the eleven chosen tracks, but mostly this is a pure, blues-based release, more poignant as this is a testament to his relationship with Laura his wife who recently died. Produced by his friends, Joe Bonamassa and Josh Smith who play guitar on the album, also Reece Wynans on keyboards and a backing crew of top-class musicians this is a masterpiece of emotion. It opens with a Little Milton track, Lonely Man, although given an Otis Rush feel on this arrangement. The title tune is a Fred James number, Life Is Hard will melt any cold heart, such a powerful tune and beautiful love song, the lyrics are haunting and Mike's guitar playing is superb, so much rhythm here by the band a full sound. Stevie Wonder's Have A Talk With God is an upbeat tune, great backing vocals here and a catchy groove. Mike's, Forever My Love is the highlight, on this ballad there is a heavy Gary Moore trademark, raw emotion, just

> *the best body of work he has made!*

listen to the lyrics. Noone To Talk To has a rocky BB King feel, the band cranking things up now. Tinsley Ellis' Dying To Do Wrong brings some rocky blues. These Eyes, the Guess Who tune is given a new slant, vocally Mike has never been better, keyboards are sublime, well-arranged tune. Tab Benoit's Darkness is well delivered, a dark sombre tune. Without Loving You, another Zito composition deals with grieving and loss. Likewise, the gut-wrenching emotional tones running through the version of Walter Trout's Nobody Moves Me Like You Do is amazing. Rev. Gary Davis tune, Death Don't Have No Mercy finishes this release off, a hauntingly beautiful ending to an outstanding release.

COLIN CAMPBELL

classy Americana should definitely check this out, I can pretty much guarantee that you certainly won't be disappointed.

NORMAN DARWEN

BIG HARP GEORGE
BIG HARP GEORGE DOES CHRISTMAS

Blue Mountain Records

One look at the cheesy artwork on the sleeve of this one, featuring a bearded old geezer in a Santa hat reflected in a Christmas tree bauble, and I immediately feared the worst. Imagine my surprise when this album turned out to be a minor delight, with Bay Area bluesman George Bisharat mercilessly parodying the entire baleful genre, one jingle bell at a time. As Bisharat jokes on the liner notes: "Please don't let me do this again. It's been a strain on my mental health and hell on my wallet too." The songwriting is on the whole pretty nifty, and there's some excellent musicianship on offer too. Big Harp George, as Bisharat styles himself, leads the way with his chromatic harmonica work, with notable guitar contributions from former Musselwhite sideman Kid Andersen and the late Little Charlie Baty and some well tidy horn arrangements. Best track is Thee Three Kings, which inevitably celebrates Albert, BB and Freddie rather than the trio of monarchs who carried gold, frankincense and myrrh to the infant messiah. But Reindeer On Strike and War On Christmas! are lyrically clever and humorous too. That Grinch Is Me will appeal to elderly curmudgeons everywhere. I'm not saying this is a CD's worth of all-killer blues you'll want to play all year round. But you could easily find yourself dusting it off next time the festive season rolls round again.

DAVID OSLER

BIG JAY MCNEELY
BLOW, BIG JAY, BLOW – THE SINGLES COLLECTION – 1949 – 1962

Acrobat Music

You get a lot of music for your money on this release. In the thirteen years that are covered by this comprehensive release we get 53 tracks that range from pensive and moody jazz to screeching up-beat blues and woogie. Most of the music features Big Jay McNeely and his toothy, breezy Tenor Saxophone tone playing alongside four-piece bands. Although it is jazz, the music is accessible and tuneful. Although pieces such as Benson's Groove are well played, it is in the simpler chords and grooves, such as Wild Wig where Big Jay's style comes to the fore. Although he is not as technical as later players such as John Coltrane or as characterful as Ornette Coleman, it is good music, and the variety of backing bands, ensembles and singers means that each track has a colour and sonic identity of its own. The title track is all good time brass, swinging drums, bass and piano with choral harmonies, and the saxophone screaming over the top. This is good time music, with a toe-tapping beat and playing that takes in all of the sonic range of the Tenor Saxophone. In the 1950's and onwards there was a trend for swinging rock and roll songs led by saxophones, and Big Jay McNeely was at the heart of the scene and sound. Although the most recent of the recordings is more than sixty years old, with all of the limited recording mixing and recording it is still a fine document of a time and a musical movement that was all about lively playing, and music that still stands up to listening to today.

BEN MACNAIR

BILLY WRIGHT
BLUES FOR MY BABY – COLLECTED RECORDINGS 1949 - 1959

Acrobat

The timespan of this two-CD release means that it pretty much covers the development from Rhythm and Blues to Rock 'n' roll over the decade. There are some familiar blues items, with individually distinctive renditions of tracks like Doctor Clayton's Gotta Find My Baby and St. Louis Jimmy's Goin' Down Slow mixing with jumping blues like the aptly named Billy's Boogie Blues and the mambo flavoured If I Didn't Love You. The set opens with some loose down-home numbers with a veneer of sophistication provided by the sax-work, but the man born William Wright in Atlanta, Georgia, in a year yet to be fully clarified (1918 is a strong contender) and given the soubriquet "The Prince Of The Blues", was a flamboyant performer. He was putting gospel techniques into his blues at a time when this was still highly contentious.

Although often overlooked these days, his main claim to fame for many is his influence on a young Little Richard, who adopted his look, musical approach, stage act and hairstyle. Billy went on to record for Savoy Records, the source of most of these titles, and as the track listing progresses chronologically, including several US R&B chart hits, it is possible to hear the transition to Rock and roll fairly clearly, with arrangements becoming tighter. There is a world of difference from the opening Blues For My Baby from 1949 to his 1955 recording for Peacock, The Question (Wha'cha Gonna Do), with its romping, brassy, up-tempo arrangement, and Billy in fine voice trading off the band's call-and-response vocal chorus. Then there is 1959's Have Mercy Baby, very Little Richard styled, the master maybe imitating the pupil. Let's hope this very enjoyable set puts some spotlight back on Billy Wright; he certainly used something on his hair… and he's worth it.

NORMAN DARWEN

BLUE DEAL

CAN'T KILL ME TWICE

Independent

The newest release from German blues rockers Blue Deal follows the success of the band as winners of the German Blues Challenge, leading them to participate in the International Blues Challenge in Memphis and the European Blues Challenge in Braga, Portugal in 2024. The album kicks off with Short Time Runner, a well-paced blues rocker showcasing the band's class. Joe Fischer's vocals, Tom Vela's innovative guitar work, Jürgen Schneckenburger's rhythmic drumming, and Martin Bürger's groove on bass create a harmonious sound. Can't Kill Me Twice, the first ballad, maintains a classic rock feel, with Joe's vocals reminiscent of Steven Tyler's vocal style, love the organ driven tones also. The song is tasteful, flawless, and perfectly balanced. Hard Times; continues the blues rock journey with a solid mid-tempo upbeat style, featuring keys and strings on equal footing. Gilded Cage, stands out as a southern rocker, fulfilling all the necessary criteria. Seen To Be Believed is a blues-rooted ballad with a guitar that eschews flashy solos for emotive, omitted tones. Favourite Mistake is a blues rock piece with a captivating opening riff, while Got 2 Go, is adorned with excellent harmonica sounds. Bluecata, serves as a fine interlude with guitar and harp, and 1942 shuffles beautifully. Stand By, pays homage to the blues-souled hard rock, reflecting the band's roots in Freiburg, and Over, concludes the album with a healing ballad about the passage of time. Overall, these eleven tracks are well arranged and showcases a very tight band of musicians.

COLIN CAMPBELL

BOB CORRITORE & FRIENDS

PHOENIX BLUES RUMBLE

Vizztone/SWMAF

Whenever I see an album with the name Bob Corritore in the title, a big smile appears on my face. Now, there are many albums featuring Bob Corritore & Friends, and each one is sublime in its content. The Phoenix Blues Rumble is no exception. Having moved from his native Chicago in 1981, Corritore has immersed himself hook line, and sinker into the Phoenix Blues scene, collaborating with so many of the state Blues musicians, hence this album. Many of the tracks were recorded between 1987 -2017, some were released, and many were not. Big Fat Woman 480 LBS, kicks off this trip into the vaults with Chico Chism belting out the vocals as if his very life depended on it, add to that, he also lends a hand on the drums. A raunchy fast-paced Blues tune with more than a hint of sexual gratification within the lyrics. Now, as we all know, Bob Corritore is famous for his harmonica playing, and plying his trade with this bunch of musos from Phoenix, certainly enhances his reputation. There are so many adept Harmonica players around, but I've not heard a better one than Mr. Corritore for a very long time. Come To Me Baby (Chief Schabuttie Gilliams-Vocals), and a guest appearance on guitar from Kirk Fletcher, tell you everything you need to know about the Blues. I could list every track by name, space allowing, and wax lyrical about each song, but space does not allow it, unfortunately. Jennie Bea, Real Bad Day, and the last song on the album, I'm Evil, showcase everything that the Blues and Bob Corritore stand for. Once again, an outstanding foray into the vaults of lesser-known Blues tunes. Thank God for the vaults.

STEPHEN HARRISON

BROOKS WILLIAMS

DIAMOND DAYS

Red Guitar Blue Music

Born in Statesboro, Georgia, but now living in the leafy suburbs of, Cambridge, England, Brooks Williams has released his first solo album for four years. This album is not one for the Blues purists among us, but that does not matter, what the album is, is a storybook about the Blues told through the mouth of Americana Now, as we all know, Blues and Americana are closely linked, both feature stories about American Folk Music. So, in effect, what we are getting with the album is two for the price of one. Blues tales about cities, events, good and bad, with the twist of Dylanesque thoughts. Blue Sky, and London Road, fall very easily into the Americana pot, laid-back acoustic guitar, Smokey vocals, and an easy, peaceful feeling. Now where have I heard that phrase before? Pony, written by the great artist and actor, Tom Waits, brings the tale of Blues into the equation, whilst still retaining the softer side that Americana brings, this is what makes me really like what I'm hearing. I mentioned Dylanesque-type music earlier, well, the song, Nettie Moore is not normally on the tip of your tongue when you mention Bob Dylan, I don't quite understand Doing Fine, why I digress, no one can copy or imitate Bob Dylan, and that is exactly what Brook Williams steers clear from with his rendition of Nettie

FOGHAT

SONIC MOJO

Foghat Records

Since the sad passing at the end of 2022 of Savoy Brown founding member, Kim Simmonds, Foghat has managed to come up with an album that pays tribute to him and to the rest of the members of both bands that started collaborating when Savoy Brown dispersed. Before his untimely death, Kim Simmonds and the guys wrote some tunes together that feature on Sonic Mojo. The rest of the album is made up of a few Blues classics and some tunes that were written by Foghat as they are now. So what we have is a heady mixture of the best of two fantastic bands, and iconic Blues artists, what's not to like? The album kicks off with, She's A Little Bit Of Everything, a song written by Kim Simmonds and the rest of the band. A lovely up-tempo ditty that combines great songwriting and great playing. I've fallen in love with the first track, this is really good. Mean Woman Blues hardly needs an introduction, it does what it says on the tin. The magnificent vocals of Scott Holt give this song a real Blues feel, gutsy and raw, full of trouble. Let Me Love You Baby, and How Many More Years, by Willie Dixon and Chester Burnett respectively, are two of my favourite Blues tunes. Don't be fooled into thinking that these are merely copies, far from it, these renditions have a life of their own Wish I'd Been There is a tribute to Hank Williams, what does he have to do with the Blues I hear you ask? Well, nothing really, is the answer, but what a great tune it is. This is one of the things that I love about this band and this album, neither conforms to rigid rules. This is a brilliant album, I'm certain that Kim Simmonds would heartily approve, of that, I have no doubt.

> *this band and this album, neither conforms to rigid rules*

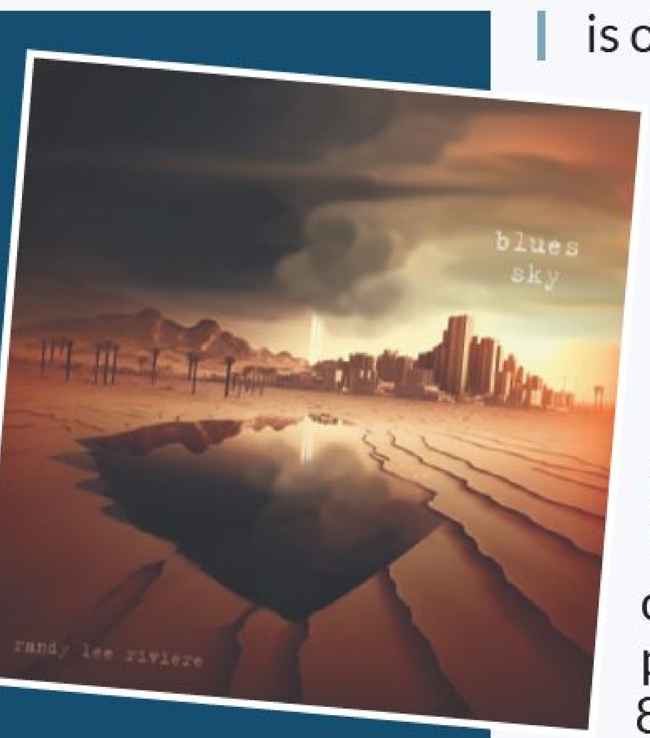
STEPHEN HARRISON

Arnie Goodman

Moore. To be fair to him, his version is very good and enjoyable, different than that of Dylan, for obvious reasons, Willaims is his own man after all. Doing Fine, for me, sums up the last thirty years or so of William's life, hard work, determination, and ability to produce worthwhile musical utterances such as this.

STEPHEN HARRISON

RANDY LEE RIVIERE



BLUES SKY

Wilderness Records

Singer-songwriter Randy Lee Riviere's latest album, marks a notable shift in his musical style, guided by acclaimed producer Kevin McKendree. Blues Sky sees Riviere transforming into a stomping blues-rocker. Known for his environmental advocacy, Riviere addresses issues like development and gentrification in his albums. Despite his previous work under the moniker Mad Buffalo, this album epitomises his blues-rock evolution. Rivière's association with McKendree has taken him to the heart of Nashville, where he now splits his time between Wyoming and Tennessee. The album features McKendree on keys and guitars, alongside a four-piece ensemble. The opening track, American Redoubt, channels ZZ Top with lyrics reminiscent of Neil Young's storytelling style. You're So Kind has a Rolling Stones type riff. Needles bluntly summarises the displacement caused by development; lyrics are acerbic. Riviere maintains his political stance on tracks like Got No Spit Shine and Just One More Time, addressing materialism and wealth. The blues infused What You Know About Pain and the powerful notations on Old

> *he feels what he sings and has such a musical range*

Country's Son highlight Riviere's angst. Rocky's Road has a rootsy vibe, while Joseline explores the impact of a failed relationship. The release concludes with the gospel tones of Cold, Cold, River, featuring the McCrary Sisters. Riviere's vocals shine on this stand out tune. Powerful guitar riffs, eleven well-crafted songs with insightful and provoking lyrics, a wonderful release full of differing genres and arrangements. A great storyteller, he feels what he sings and has such a musical range, great release.

COLIN CAMPBELL

DAN PENN

THE INSIDE TRACK ON BOBBY PURIFY

Dandy Studios

I must admit to being somewhat confused about the point of this long album, especially given the 20 songs are 10 songs by one singer and the same 10 songs by another singer! I am sure there will be a divide over who does the best job but in my humble opinion it would be Bobby Purify. For several reasons, the voice is full of soul and depth, the arrangement is smooth and soulful, and there is a warmth in the music and a pace that is confident. To be fair to Dan his version is paired back when you see the list of musicians accompanying him compared with the long list Bobby has, no wonder his version has more soul, musicality, and depth. Dan is the storyteller, Bobby the voice. This project orchestrated by Dan Penn is obviously a labour of love and something out of the ordinary, the story, in full detail, of the idea for the project, how, why and with whom it came to fruition accompanies the CD. There is also the interview by Bill Bentley of Dan Penn on the subject of this project from 2022. At 80 years of age, having been in the business for 50 years, Dan Penn can do just as he likes and likes to do just that! If you're looking for a good blues album with a hell of a back story, this one's for you!

JEAN KNAPPITT

DANIELLE NICOLE

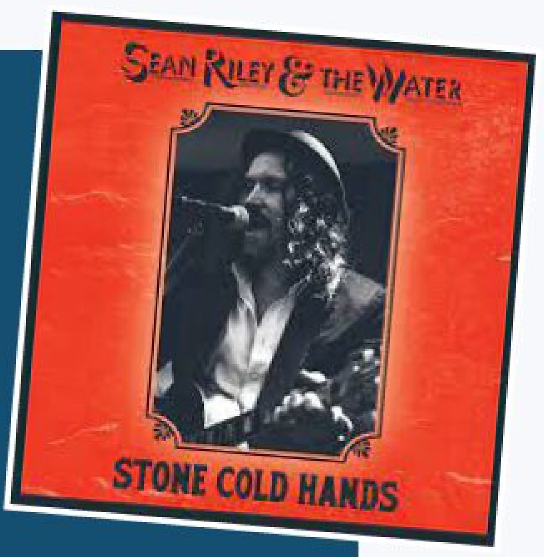
THE LOVE YOU BLEED

Forty Below Records

Danielle Nicole, a Grammy-nominated artist, and seven-time Blues Music Award winner, asserts her musical prowess in her newest release. Recognised as one of the foremost singers and bassists in contemporary roots music, Nicole approached this album with a distinct vision. Departing from the thematic focus of past records, she reveals that over half the songs explore the nuances of falling in love rather than navigating its destructive aftermath. Produced by Tony Braunagel (known for his work with Taj Mahal, Eric Burdon, Robert Cray) and mixed by John Porter (renowned for collaborations with B.B. King, Buddy Guy, Bryan Ferry), the album weaves a tapestry of love, loss, willpower, determination, and the myriad of emotions entwined with love. The track, Make Love, poignantly addresses the conscious decision to transcend pain, choosing love, family, and community amidst life's challenges. How Did We Get to Goodbye lays bare a soured love affair without casting blame, prompting introspection on the path to such emotional pain. Love On My Brain emerges as a dynamic blend of vintage R&B and driving blues, showcasing Nicole's genre-spanning versatility. Right By Your Side stands as a classic soul/R&B ballad, cautioning against the regret of letting the right partner slip away. Overall, Danielle Nicole crafts a rich and diverse musical landscape, skilfully navigating the complex terrain of love's myriad of expressions. The album is a testament to her artistry, demonstrating a mature and nuanced approach to storytelling through soulful melodies and evocative lyrics.

COLIN CAMPBELL

SEAN RILEY & THE WATER



STONE COLD HANDS

Pugnacious Records

The debut release from Sean Riley & The Water's debut full-length album highlights the essence of New Orleans' musical tapestry. It weaves throughout this nine-track masterpiece. Sean Riley's distinct voice, evocative lyrics, and guitar prowess shine, carrying the listener through a sonic journey that traverses the realms of groovy boogie blues and swampy back porch shindigs. This release pays homage to the roots of southern music, embracing the city's heartbeat and soul. Riley's compositions delve into themes of profound loss and lingering regret, yet the quality of musicianship maintains an upbeat and positive momentum.

> *This release pays homage to the roots of southern music*

A standout is the Mississippi juke blues cover, Jimmy Reed's High And Lonesome, injecting a swaggering pulse into the collection. Featuring a constellation of Louisiana's musical luminaries, the album boasts the accordion and harmonica talents of Bruce "Sun pie" Barnes, the Cajun/Zydeco magic of Waylon Thibodeaux's rocking fiddle, especially on the wonderful tune, A Losing Hand. The versatile keyboard and organ artistry of Phil Breen is palpable on the instrumental Rosie's Rag. Tiffany Pollack adds sweet harmonies, creating a delightful interplay with Megan Harris Brunious and Whitney Alouisious on the final tune, Shine A Little Stronger. The rhythmic heartbeat is provided by drummer Mike Barras and the unwavering bassist-producer, Dean Zucchero. Sean Riley, a familiar face in the New Orleans music scene, tours extensively, bringing the fluid ensemble of The Water to stages across Europe and Australia. "Stone Cold Hands" is a testament to Riley's musical prowess and a celebration of the vibrant sounds that emanate from the heart of New Orleans.

COLIN CAMPBELL

GHALIA VOLT

SHOUT SISTER SHOUT

Ruf Records

Ghalia Volt's latest venture, recorded in the vicinity of Joshua Tree in California and produced by David Catching at Rancho De La Luna studio, presents a sonic departure from her earlier Mississippi Hill Country and Delta blues style. The result is a nostalgic nod to the 70s psychedelic sound, as Ghalia collaborates with a core band featuring herself on guitar and vocals, alongside Danny Frankel on drums and Ben Allerman on keys. Catching contributes occasional guitar parts, enriching the overall musical landscape. The laid-back ambiance of the recording sessions is evident in Ghalia's vocal delivery, characterized by a subtle accent and a lightly

CASSIUS KING AND THE DOWN-TOWN RULERS

LAST CALL FOR THE BLUES

Big Ear Audio

Cassius King and The Downtown Rulers are a US five-piece who have released their debut 'Last Call For The Blues' a collection of five tracks recorded at Sonic Rocket Studio, Fallbrook, CA. Frontman Cassius King has spent the last 25 years in entertainment as an audio engineer and production manager for some of the biggest names in the business. Enlisting the talents of producer Dave Daring, recording engineer Daniel Martin and Marsh Mastering, opener Do It All Again is essentially dealing with the repetitive activity of going to work everyday to pay bills as he sing "See the kids need shoes and I gotta pay rent" whilst Chalo Ortiz on electric guitar provides a fluid tone. "If you Love Me (Like You Say)" is penned by Johnny Taylor has a standard blues song approach and works well with drummer J.R. Lozano and bassist Chris White keeping the rhythm tight and groovy. Feel Good Music includes phrases such as "One for

> *nothing short of a musical revelation*

the money, two for the show" as (Cassius) King provides an upbeat chorus and keys and I suspect that this will become a live favourite if it is not already. Better Man Blues is again an original composition and allows the full band to let loose as the guitar solo rings out. Closer Last Call For The Blues is a steady number with a King in a reflective frame of mind as tinges of organ can be heard in the background – a definite highlight for this scribe. Overall, Last Call For The Blues is a strong introduction to this band and whilst they do not try and reinvent the blues opting for the original style you cannot deny that they seem to have understood the brief to the letter with their impressive musicianship on display for everyone to hear.

GLENN SARGEANT

distorted quality. This is particularly enchanting on tracks like Insomnia and Can't Have It All, where the hypnotic effect is enhanced by Indian-style percussion and a gradually building core riff. The album displays versatility, with nods to Ghalia's earlier work in the slide guitar infused No Happy Home and ventures into rock territory, exemplified by the energetic twin guitars and organ solos in Every Cloud.
The title track, Shout Sister Shout, exudes a bluesy essence, featuring a compelling rhythm and Ghalia's empowering lyrics encouraging women to assert themselves. The album's psychedelic undertones resurface in the dreamy vocals of Changes, and the sixties-inspired organ style of She's Holdin' You Back. The diversity continues with the slide-driven dynamism of Can't Have It All. Closing the album is Po' Boy John, a piano-led, spirited finale narrating the tale of an old guitar and its journey through various settings. An eclectic mix of blues, rock, and psychedelic elements, Ghalia's best release to date.

COLIN CAMPBELL

JAMES OLIVER BAND

HUMOUR DOES BELONG IN MUSIC... LIVE AT TEMPERANCE

Independent

The latest release is a live one recorded at Temperance, Leamington Spa. James on lead guitar and vocals, Chris Bywater on bass guitar and Mark Kemlo on drums. This is a lively and entertaining album that masterfully blends musical prowess with a generous dose of humour, if he was not such a great guitarist, he'd be a wonderful stand-up comedian, he is just so entertaining. Opening with Tear it Up, he breathes new life into a classic Johnny Burnette track, showcasing his outstanding guitar skills and charismatic stage presence. The humorous touch added by James sets a light-hearted tone for the entire album. The band's interpretation of T-Bone Shuffle with James delivering a mesmerising guitar solo on his Fender is sublime. American Cars is a high-octane rock 'n' roll treat. He injects humour into the performance, keeping the audience engaged. Hideaway brings a playful tribute to Freddie King. Likewise, the tribute to Howlin' Wolf in Who's Been Talking. James's original composition, Only Thing I Lack Is A Cadillac, stands out as a fast-paced rockabilly gem. Sweet Little Angel delivers a fast-paced rocker with stunning guitar strumming. Chicken and the Duck is a tongue-twisting rock 'n' roll delight. The instrumental, Sleepwalk offers a calming interlude before the exhilarating surf tracks Walk Don't Run and Apache. Real Gone Lover, features James's superb vocal style, bringing Van Morrison's hit to new

Rob Blackham

BEX MARSHALL

FORTUNA

Dixiefrog Records

Bex Marshall's highly anticipated studio album, unfolds as a ten-track blues masterpiece, displaying a rich tapestry of addictive hooks and compelling storylines. As a notable songwriter, Bex pushes the boundaries of blues with her own unique feel and style. Making a formidable statement as a leading guitarist, Bex takes the helm in co-producing this powerful and mostly self-penned album. Her guitar work is a revelation, featuring soaring lead lines, technical ragtime, and assertive slide playing. From the first note of the gospel tinged, Preaching To The Choir, it just grabs the listener in and won't let go. The release marks a significant return, arriving ten years after Bex's last one. Dirty Water is a stunning reinterpretation, she doffs her hat to an influence of hers Tina Turner here, in the style of Steamy Windows. The title track, Fortuna is a wonderful instrumental with so many musical layers. 5 a.m. is another stunning tune a true bluesy feel throughout, destined to be a classic.

> *a soulful rock blues journey with funky undertones*

Table For One is another highlight, catchy riffs meet cutting lyrics here. Bex collaborated with local London talents, including Richie Stevens on drums, Toby Baker on keyboards, B.J Cole on dobro, Robert Eugene Daniels on bass guitar, to contribute their expertise. The result is an exquisitely crafted album, born from a week-long recording session at Snakepit Studios in North London. The release is a soulful rock blues journey with funky undertones, infused with touches of gospel and roots. Engineered, co-produced, and mastered by Nick Hunt, who previously collaborated with Bex on her album House of Mercy, this stands as a testament to Bex's musical evolution; a triumphant and diverse return that solidifies her place in the contemporary blues landscape.

COLIN CAMPBELL

heights. Finally, Mean Little Mama, combines storytelling with unique guitar playing to leave the audience clapping for more. James Oliver is an extraordinary musical talent, but this release also showcases the band's playful and comedic side. In a world that can often be serious, this is a welcome reminder of the joy that music and humour can bring.

COLIN CAMPBELL

BLOOD BROTHERS

LIVE IN CANADA

Gulf Coast Records

Blood Brothers' Live In Canada album, is a rollicking musical journey that not only captures the ambiance but pulsates with an infectious energy. From the opening notes of Hey Sweet Mama, the band unleashes a sonic storm, combining blister-fingered guitar runs and powerful vocals that resonate with both precision and passion. Produced by the award-winning guitarist Mike Zito and recorded at Blue Frog Studios in British Columbia, Canada, the twelve energetic tracks showcase the band's tight ensemble performance. Each musician, including Albert Castiglia on vocals and guitars, Doug Byrkit on bass, Matt Johnson and Ephraim Lowell on drums/percussion, and Lewis Stephens on piano/organ, demonstrates an impressive level of musical synergy. The album pays homage to the golden era of rock with echoes of Foghat, Black Oak Arkansas, and early J. Geils Band, evoking the spirit of those

> *ensures an enjoyable time for all within earshot*

legendary acts firing on all cylinders. The vocals are indulgent, the guitars slice through the air, and there's an authenticity to the music that avoids any hint of retro imitation. Blood Brothers' electrified blues is exemplified in tracks like Tooth & Nail and Hill Country Jam, injecting a shot of adrenaline into rock and roll. The album seamlessly blends heady rock ingredients with soulful aggregations, evident in tracks such as In My Soul and A Thousand Heartaches. This isn't just party music; it's a 110 percent concoction of precision and potency that transcends nostalgia. Whether it's the scalding My Business, the barrelhouse piano on Bag Me, Tag Me, Take Me Away, or the Neil Young classic Rockin' In The Free World, Blood Brothers ensures an enjoyable time for all within earshot.

COLIN CAMPBELL

Laura Carbone

JJ GREY & MOFRO

OLUSTEE

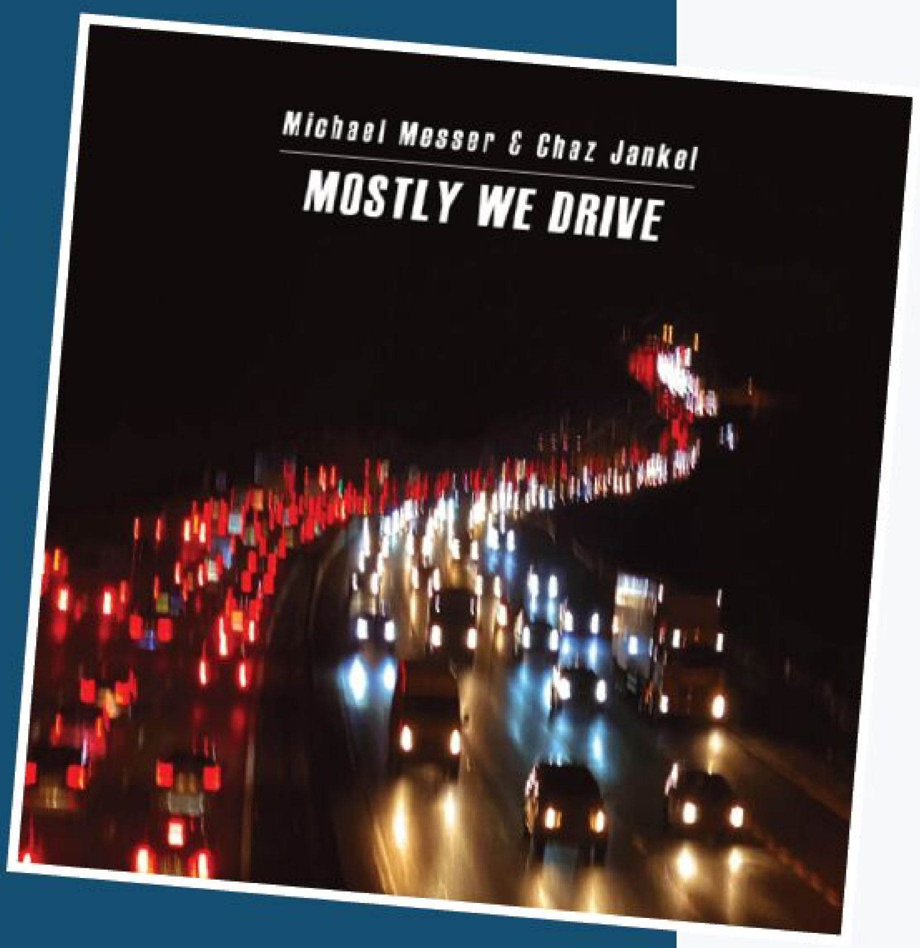
Alligator Records

After a hiatus of nine years, JJ Grey makes a triumphant return with a mesmerising compilation of eleven profoundly emotional songs, a fusion of rock with a funk twist and Southern soul melodies that echo from front porch gatherings. This release is an assertively groove-centric album, propelled by JJ's raw, impassioned vocals and the piercing notes of his guitar. The result is a record that not only highlights Grey's musical prowess but also exudes an irresistible energy that captivates listeners from start to finish. On his debut self-produced album, JJ Grey, shares his personal narratives infused with universal topics of redemption, renewal, adversity, and inner tranquility. Through his music, Grey not only delves into his own life and experiences in the Northern Florida swamps but also joyously commemorates moments of camaraderie with lifelong friends. Often within the same song, he skilfully blends the sensual with the intellectual, as on the funky tones to Rooster. With a gritty baritone that oozes sincere passion, Grey's vividly detailed and timeless originals bear witness to his honest storytelling, delivered with the fervour of a preacher pounding the pulpit. The opener, The Sea, exemplifies his storytelling, and the listener gets a sense of what the song means through the lyrics, very atmospheric, stunning start. Top Of The World is an upbeat tune full of rhythm, the band laying some laid-back tones and the horn section lifts this to another level of cool. On A Breeze has a country ballad feel with a twist, the musicianship is mesmerising. Wonderland ups the tone, a real celebration song, punctuated with horns and rhythm, outstanding. Starry Night has a bluesy, gospel feel, sweet guitar work and strings, a powerful song full of emotion. A standout release, best he has made, well worth the wait.

COLIN CAMPBELL

MICHAEL MESSER & CHAZ JANKEL

MOSTLY WE DRIVE



Knife Edge Records

It is always fascinating when two stellar careers connect. We all look on, never sure when it is going to be a catastrophe or result in something of genius. Michael Messer is a songwriter, singer and a superb guitarist, noteworthy for his ability to combine acoustic and electric National slide and lap steel guitar into his playing style. He also designs and builds guitars and has been rated alongside Duane Allman and Ry Cooder as a slide player. Chaz Jankel, of course, is most noted as Ian Dury's co-songwriter and keyboard player in The Blockheads, but he also has 9 solo albums to his credit and is a prolific producer. His musical leanings are towards funk and soul, and he brings a very different sound to Messer's straight Blues. The album is a very different project for Jankel too, and it comes from him being gifted one of Messer's Resonator guitars as a 70th birthday present. The two then started working on some ideas that

> *nothing short of a musical revelation*

Jankel had started and a jam in Jankel's studio resulted in rough mixes for the pair to work on through Covid. September 2021 was the first real chance for the pair to start working together. The album feels very much like a true collaboration. I don't hear any ego being exercised, or shortcuts being taken. A lot feels like two friends jamming and there is a palpable sense of joy throughout. The quality of the playing is exceptional, they are both masters at their crafts, and the end result is an album of many highs and no lows. The music just flows easily. The title track has a walking Blues pace, which these days is about the pace of driving as well. It Doesn't Matter has a much angrier tone but, for me, Music Brings Us Close Together is the track I enjoyed most as it describes all the kinds of music that we can enjoy. A delightful way to be starting the new year.

ANDY SNIPPER

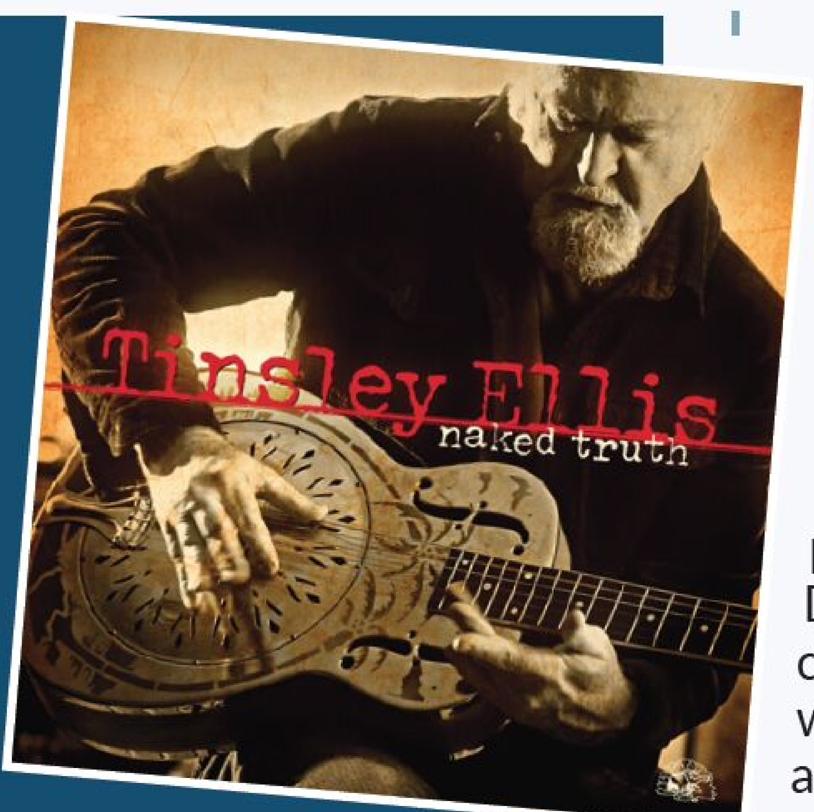
JOHN MAYALL

LIVE IN FRANCE 1967-1973

Repertoire Records

These 2 CDs- and DVD compilations during the late 60s and early 70s cap-

TINSLEY ELLIS



NAKED TRUTH

Alligator

Given his below the radar profile on this side of the Atlantic, you could swipe past this unassuming master blues man's back catalogue without giving it a second glance, but that would be a huge mistake as Tinsley Ellis' new release, Naked Truth, thoroughly testifies in its honest grooves. If you take the time to listen, forty minutes, precisely, you will find that Tinsley Ellis firmly nails down the brass tacks acoustic approach on this release that he has adopted in his recent live performances. Throughout this first all solo acoustic album Ellis rolls up his sleeves and

> *A commanding take on Willie Dixon's Don't Go No Further*

gets down to serious business from the get-go with a stomping slide guitar masterclass on The Devil In The Room. This is re-emphasised by his doleful delivery on Son House's Death Letter Blues. A commanding take on Willie Dixon's Don't Go No Further then gives way to Tinsley's mesmerising acoustic stylings on Leo Kottke's instrumental, A Sailor's Grave On The Prairie. Switching between his trusty 1969 Martin D-35 and 1937 National Steel O Series guitars adds a straight up authenticity to all the self-penned compositions, especially Windowpane and Grown Ass Man, and well-chosen covers in Ellis' skilful hands. Given his seasoned and passionate vocals adding further weight to his real deal status, stripped back to its essentials The Naked Truth is just that.

PAUL DAVIES

ture what could arguably be the most productive part of John Mayall's career. Considering that he has enjoyed a career spanning six decades, this is some testament. Having started The Bluesbreakers which consisted of the founding members of Fleetwood Mac, and the God-like status of Eric Clapton, Mayall could have been forgiven for resting on his very talented musical laurels. However, that was never his style. He kept emerging with new and up-and-coming Blues musicians, and Blues and Jazz stalwarts such as Dick Heckstall-Smith and the soon-to-be Rolling Stone, Mick Taylor. Throw into the mix Keef Hartley and the much-missed, Anthony "Duster" Bennett, and you have another formation that continues the legacy of John Mayall. This unique insight, courtesy of French Television and live recordings of the gig shows the band in what can only be described as their natural habitat, on stage. Covering songs by, B.B. King, Sonny " Boy" Williamson, and Willie Dixon as well as the amazing catalogue of tunes by Mayall himself, this 2-disc set and DVD help to portray just how influential France was in the 60s in helping to keep alive the Blues, especially as many Blues musicians had started to tour the UK, and Europe thanks mainly to the resurgence in authentic Blues music that had found its popularity growing once more on the back of the British Blues Boom. Travellin' Man, Walking On Sunset, and Baby, What's Wrong With You, help to bring out the best in these musicians. A medley of tunes by Willie Dixon and Sonny " Boy" Williamson adds to the excitement, it doesn't matter how many times you've heard these songs, John Mayall and his band give you a new perspective on things. Dick Heckstall-Smith combines Jazz and Blues with his Saxophone adding a smokey, whiskey-soaked ambiance to the proceedings. The DVD allows you to see first-hand this amazing group of musicians as it was recorded, simple, grainy, but oh-so good. I love John Mayall's music, be it live to watch or live to listen to. Live In France affords us the best of both worlds.

STEPHEN HARRISON

LIAM WARD BAND

SHINE

Green Bullet Records

Harmonica wizard Ward and his band with their second album recorded live in the studio with minimal overdubs featuring ten self-penned songs. Opening track, I Got Lucky is a loping blues which swings mightily featuring Ward on bullet harp and vocals and Malcolm Thorne on lead guitar. Stone In My Shoe Is a toe-tapper featuring a funky bassline from Zach Bartlett and an extended harp solo. The insistent beat of 500 Dollar Bill finds drummer Joe Harris driving the band along and Ward producing fine expressive vocals and harp work. My favourite here is title track Shine which features a rumbling Bo Diddley style beat and builds steadily to a grandstand finish and is a direct tribute to Liam Ward's father who passed away in 2009 at the age of 52. Ward's sisters Helen Hart and Bryony-Rose-Ward provide backing vocals on the album and all proceeds from sales will be donated to the charity Stroke Association. The lengthy slow blues Everything's Gonna Be Fine gives everyone a chance to stretch out featuring great Hammond organ from Bartlett and tasteful lead guitar from Thorne. The styles and sounds here have echoes of the classic Chicago/Chess Studios era particularly Sonny Boy Williamson and Little Walter.

KEVIN BURT

THANK YOU, MR BILL: A TRIBUTE TO BILL WITHERS

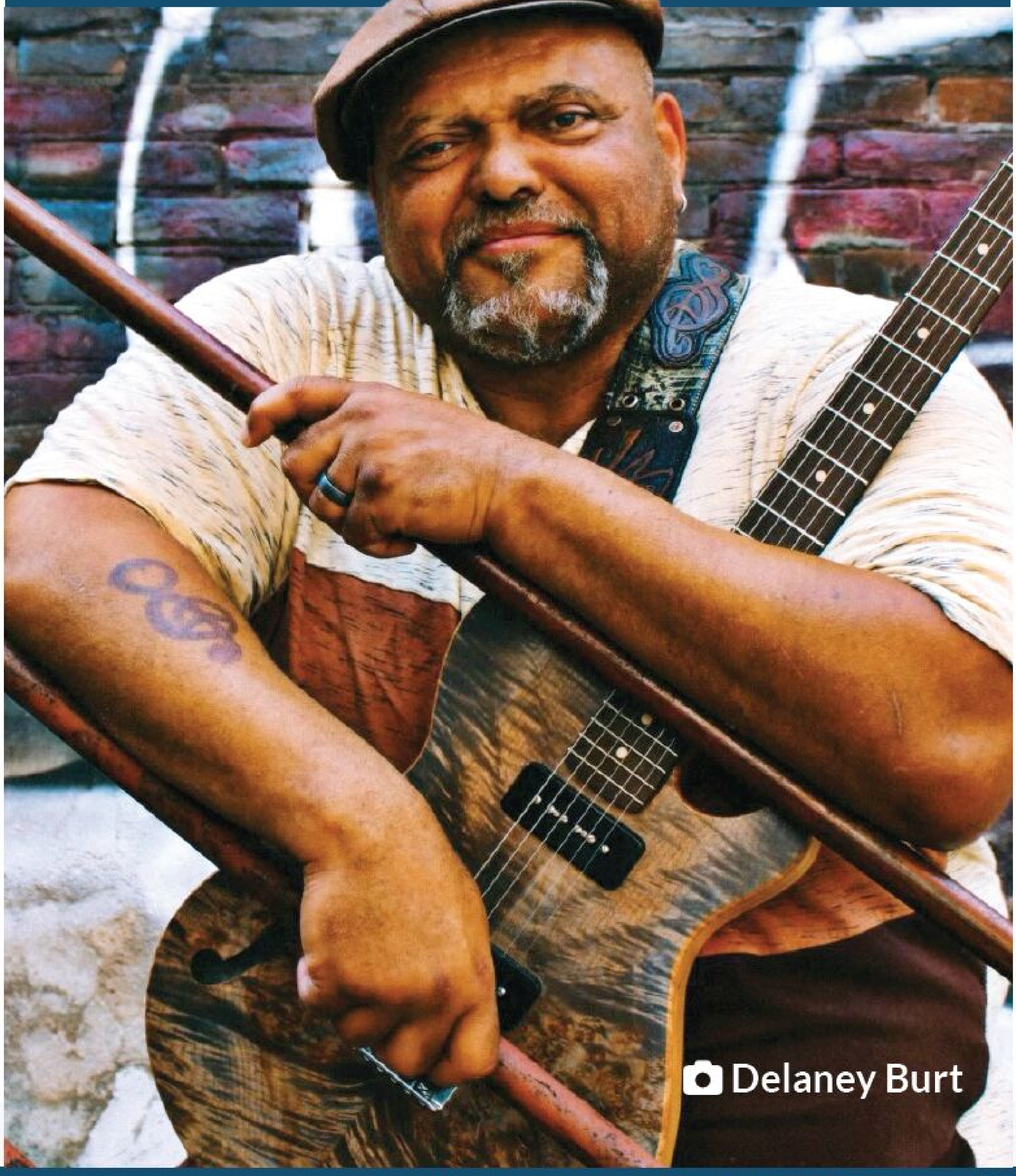
Gulf Coast Records

The latest release by blues musician and songwriter Kevin Burt, along with his band Big Medicine, pays homage to Bill Withers who had a profound impact on Kevin's musical style. Twelve reinterpretations and one written by Kevin, make this a compilation to savour. The opening track, a rendition of Who Is He (And What Is He To You) sets the tone with excellent guitar work and a strong groove. Burt covers several other tracks from Withers' discography, including Kissing My Love and Just The Two Of Us, infusing each with his own style and passion. The album displays Burt's versatility on guitar, harmonica, and vocals, accompanied by Scot Sutherland on bass, Ken Valdez on guitar, and Eric Douglas on drums and percussion. Throughout the album, Burt's vocal performances are passionate and powerful, and honest, bringing new life to Withers' timeless lyrics. Tracks like World Keeps Going Round And Round and Lean On Me resonate particularly well in the current societal context. The album concludes with an original song by Burt, titled

> *Burt's vocal performances are passionate and powerful*

Thank You Brother Bill, where he directly addresses Withers, expressing gratitude and referencing several of Withers' classic songs. This release stands as a heartfelt tribute that not only celebrates Bill Withers' musical legacy but also highlights Kevin Burt's deep appreciation for the artistry that influenced him. The album captures the essence of Withers' soulful compositions while allowing Burt to express his own musical interpretation and gratitude

COLIN CAMPBELL



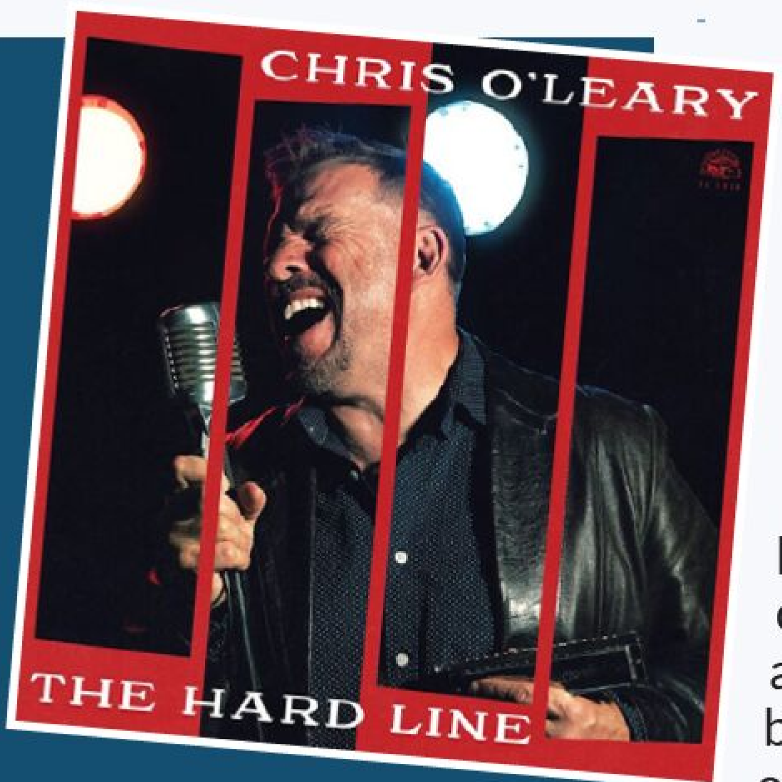
📷 Delaney Burt

The pace picks up for Pack Your Sense Of Humour with the plea "fill your life with laughter every day". Amen to that! A pleasing Latin flavour infuses Do What You Do, and this fine album closes with Give It All Up For You with Ward doing an SBW style solo song on harp and vocals. The album displays Ward's versatility and modern sounds with his excellent band whilst still tipping his hat to the masters of the classic era. Very enjoyable.

DAVE DRURY

CHRIS O'LEARY

THE HARD LINE



Alligator Records

Marking his debut with Alligator Records, Chris O'Leary is one of the blues genre's most skilled yet underrated figures, a profoundly soulful vocalist, powerhouse harmonica virtuoso, and gifted songwriter. The album showcases twelve original tracks that delve into O'Leary's extensive personal history. Each song is a compelling narrative, blending engaging, sharp-witted reflections on life and love with universal wisdom and humour. The musical landscape of this release spans rollicking roadhouse R&B, hard-hitting Chicago blues, and emotionally charged ballads. O'Leary's vocals, characterised by their raw intensity, and his world-class harmonica prowess, take centre stage, setting a dynamic pace throughout this release. His rough yet riveting delivery brings authenticity to the forefront, while his harmonica playing adds layers of skill and emotion. This is a testament to O'Leary's multifaceted talent, presenting a diverse and captivating collection that highlights not only his vocal and harmonica prowess but also his storytelling finesse. O'Leary emerges as

> *a top-quality recording*

a compelling force in the blues, ready to claim the recognition befitting his exceptional artistry. The opener, No Rest sets the pace an exhilarating tune about insomnia. The stunning track I Cry At Night deals with issues pertaining to veteran soldiers' suicide rates, emotional portrayal just has to be heard, he feels every lyric he sings. Ain't That A Crime, oozes emotion also, leaving the listener spellbound. Lay These Burdens Down has a hypnotic vibe on this slow soulful tune. Final tune is a Texas blues rocker, Love's For Sale, just sublime. Chris produced this release, honing each song. Current and former members of his band appeared on the record, so many musicians to name, a top-quality recording.

COLIN CAMPBELL

LI'L CHUCK– THE ONE MAN SKIFFLE MACHINE

SO/LO

Backyard Music

I have had the pleasure of listening to an album by this guy before, Li'l Chuck aka, David Thorpe. But he may be unheard of by quite a few people. He hails from New Zealand, writes, and plays everything himself, hence the one-man skiffle machine handle. So, to the album, thirteen lovely ditties with differing topics and sentiments. I Can't Give It Away, immediately puts me in mind of the last time I heard a true one-man band, well two actually, this takes me back to the heady days of Donovan and Dylan, both competent wordsmiths with messages for a generation-long since gone. What Li'l Chuck has done here is he's taken that mantra and delivered it as a Skiffle/Blues/Country style album. Believe me, there is a difference between him and the aforementioned artists. Chuck has a better vocal than the other two chaps and highlights his love and knowledge of the Blues to great effect. There is also lots of humour within his writing, as in the wonderful Dog Tricks, which is basically about dog walking in the woods, with references to what Bears normally do in the woods. All this is in the compounds of some great slide guitar and harmonica. A song title that you would not normally expect to see appear on any album, You Need A Kick Up The Arse, which tells me that not only is this a very enjoyable album, I'm certain that Li'l Chuck would go down a storm on the festival circuit, or in a small club, the response from the audience I've no doubt be the same. Domestic Stomp has such a masterful slide guitar running all the way through it, an absolute belter of a tune. This album can be enjoyed on any occasion, in any weather, anywhere, just sit back, relax, and immerse yourself into the world of David Thorpe.

STEPHEN HARRISON

MA POLAINE'S GREAT DECLINE

MOLECULES

OMH Records

The Ma Polaine's Great Decline have previously recorded as a band of just two; Beth Packer on Vocals / Double Bass and Clinton Hough on Guitars although for this release the line-up has been expanded to include Nick Pini on Bass and Jimmy Norden on Drums which gives the band more depth to their unique sound allowing the two main players to weave some intricate sounds that follow a predominately Folk path, but there are underlying hints of Blues and Americana albeit they are not always obvious. Beth Parker has a superb vocal style that is reminiscent of Kate Bush with her delivery and spiritual leanings, a couple of songs I would like to highlight are the song Alone, where Clinton provides some raw acoustic guitar playing alongside Beth's soaring vocal and in the latter stages of the song she slips in a couple of Harmonica solos, this contrasts well to the more aggressive sounds on the sparsely arranged song entitled Audrey where Clinton switches to an electric guitar to create a more aggressive sound, the lyrical content is full of " Lost love" type scenarios and is not overly cheery. The album has been expertly self-produced by Beth and Clinton who completed the process in just three days, I imagine the duo would find it difficult if a third party encroached on their music as it is so heartfelt and personal. In conclusion this is a captivating collection of ten songs which have a raw emotional feel to them that keep you engaged from start to finish. The musicianship is good throughout, but it is Beth Packer's vocal lucidity that forms the centre piece of the band and will be the reason you listen to this album time and time again.

ADRIAN BLACKLEE

MEDICINE HEAD

HEARTWORK

Living Room Records

On the surface, there's a smooth and occasional cracked patina of emotions across these mostly mid-tempo blues influenced tunes. However, what shines across this solid presentation of songs is John Fiddler's optimistic lyrical cogitations on the meaning of love. This harmonious musical blend is the recorded companion follow up to his previous back under the Medicine Head banner Warriors Of Love album. On Heartwork, Fiddler continues to revel in a sweet and melancholy mood as the opening track Making Up For Lost Love asserts. It's a slow burner bluesy tune not unlike a JJ Cale deep cut, even the cliched blues guitar licks find their perfect home over this deep groove. Exquisite female backing vocals float along on a bed of loose musical grooves as Fiddler speaks a personal lyrical tale on Alibi. As much follows on Everybody Has The Blues Sometimes with Fiddler expressing his fine singing voice accompanied by tasteful underplayed guitar licks. There's also a cool bluesy bite to Fiddler's voice that reveals itself in earnest on Hands In The Air. Its slide guitar motif, electric piano and loping beat fuse to sparkling effect. The blues/dub feel to Livin' In A Bubble adds a rhythmic versatility to this recording's laid-back vibe. Also, the country rock ballads Love Is Not A Dream and Gotta Hold On plus It's All About Love and closing tune Ridin' In My Car tightly fit the overall sonic architecture represented on this deeply worthwhile album. Heartwork sweetly rubs along with the cool essential essence of a Dylan, JJ Cale Chris Rea vibe about it.

PAUL DAVIES

MISSISSIPPI MACDONALD

DO RIGHT, SAY RIGHT

APM Records

The first thing that catches your attention with this 2021 album is that here's a London-based Blues master named Mississippi. When you choose your name after the wellspring state of the blues, you'd better live up to it, and Mississippi Macdonald certainly has Clarksdale blood pumping through his veins. This 14-track special edition is shot through with high-voltage Chicago energy, and all the songs are penned by the man himself. His command of authentic blues lyrics is admirable. For example, there's a documentary, travelogue simplicity to the song Devil's Chain:

'Bigshot city in the heat of day / 10-5 through to 9 / Subway train clean out of sight / Broken down Cadillac assembly line / Every dollar you earn is a link in the Devil's Chain.' His voice is strong and clear, he plays impressive guitar, and the band, featuring some truly atmospheric piano and organ from Phil Bearing, possesses a slinky, laid-back blues lounge confidence which will put you anywhere – Mississippi especially. This is mature blues by a man who has a total grip on the genre. Listen to the grown-up, heartfelt lyrics on Keep Your Hands out of My Pocket and Let Me Explore Your Mind and you'll be making a note in your diary to enjoy all this live. He's already got over 20 UK dates booked, and the blues is just the palliative we all need in our blighted corner of the globe. The great American writer William Faulkner wrote "To understand the world, you must first understand a place like Mississippi." Seems obvious that Mississippi Macdonald understands more than many. A fine album.

ROY BAINTON

MITCH GRAINGER

PLUG IT IN

Gent Music

Plug It In has been released as a double album, well to put the record straight, it's an Electric Blues album and an Acoustic Blues album. So what you get are both sides of the Blues coin, so to speak. You may ask, why do that? We have what we can term Chicago Blues and Country Blues. I, for one, think that more albums should be released this way. So, let's start with the Electric version, the album opens with the title track, Mitch Grainger showing us from the get-go just what he's about. He takes guitar, vocal, and harmonica duties on both albums with an air of confidence that belies his somewhat tender years. By the third track, Strong Woman, I'm totally in love with this album, I can find nothing to pick fault with, nothing to gripe about. An album of simplicity, with eleven songs, all originals, written by Grainger. It would be remiss of me to try and pick a standout song, but if I had no choice, Honey Bee, and Big City Blues would be my candidates for favourites. I would make the same choice with the Acoustic version of the album, that is what makes this double offering so appealing. " Smokin' and drinkin' is all I ever do" Now, if that's not one of the greatest lines in the Blues, then I'm a monkey's uncle. Plug It In epitomizes everything that we love about the Blues. With Mitch Grainger, he epitomizes what I love above most other things connected to the Blues, slide guitar, and the wailing of the harmonica. There are no fillers on this album, every tune is there on merit, as a Blues writer, I'm over the moon that we can get both versions of Plug It In. If both are released on vinyl, I'll be first in the queue. Bravo, Mitch Grainger.

STEPHEN HARRISON

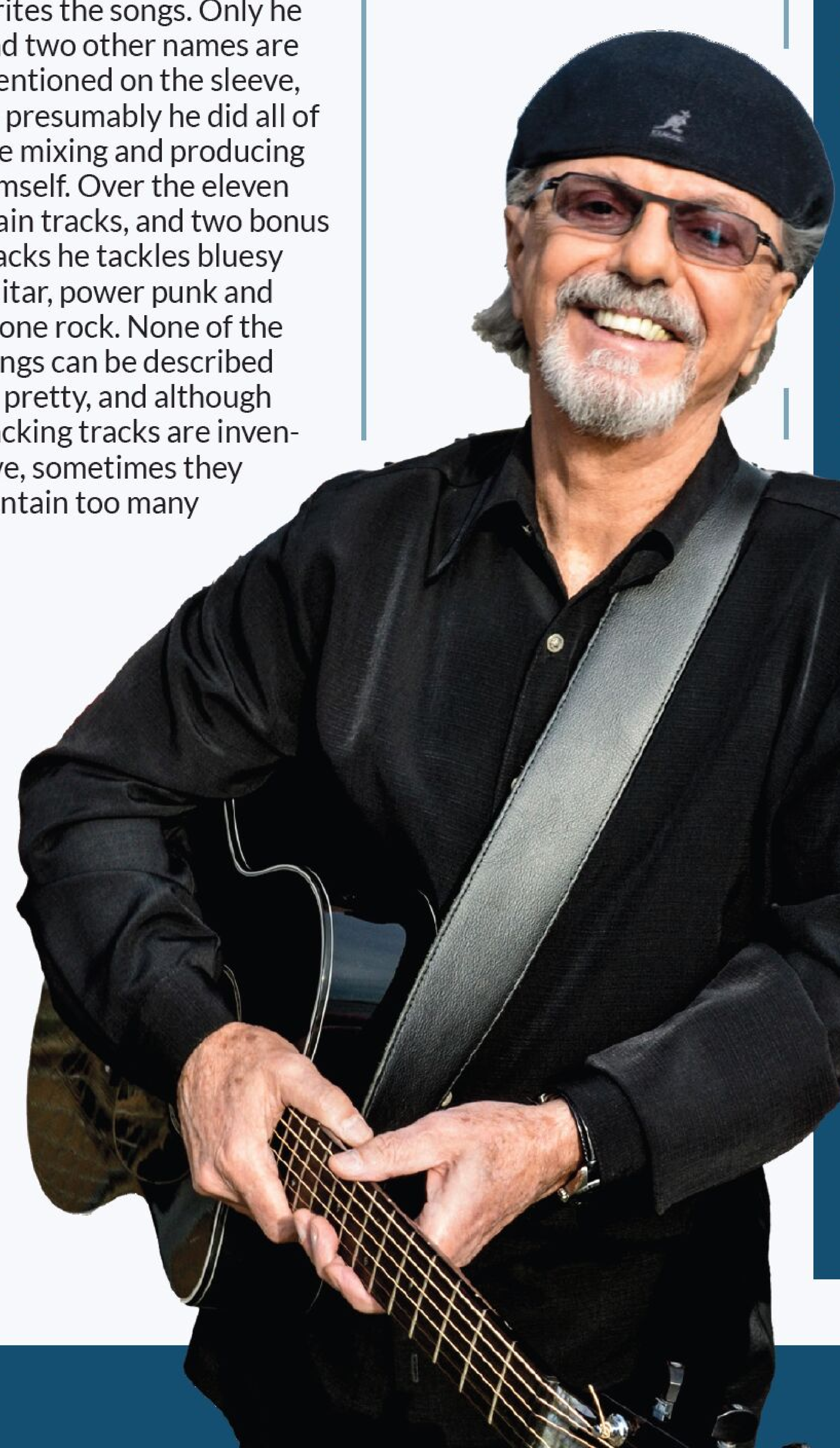
OAK ACETATOR

POWER TRIP

Blue Matter Records

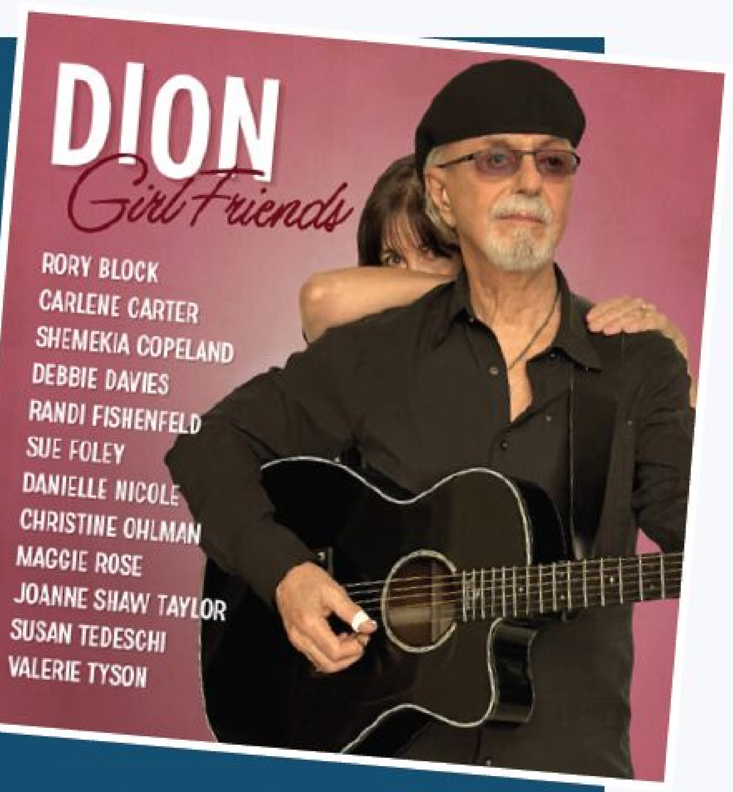
Robin May is the man behind Oak Acetator. He plays all of the instruments, sings all of the vocals, and writes the songs. Only he and two other names are mentioned on the sleeve, so presumably he did all of the mixing and producing himself. Over the eleven main tracks, and two bonus tracks he tackles bluesy guitar, power punk and drone rock. None of the songs can be described as pretty, and although backing tracks are inventive, sometimes they contain too many elements. Dehydration is a case in point, where a blues guitar solo interrupts a lo-fi backing with energetic drums but doesn't know where to go after that. With titles like I Don't Believe in War, and Another Vivisection the songs are overtly politically pointed. He has a vocal delivery halfway between punk sneering and slow rap, or a less nasal Billy Bragg, with a sound akin to the Streets. Floating Away takes a lesson from The Byrd's, via John Coltrane and the title track is a slower track with a bluesy, skeletal The flanged guitar that features on most of the tracks is an interesting addition, but there is nothing here that could be described as blues or rock, but it has elements of all genres in its musical DNA. This is a political statement in musical form, and I am sure that it has people who would appreciate something in it. Although there is something to be said for being a solo artist, more can be said for putting a proper band together with more musicians, and a bigger range of sounds, so that the music that is produced is less self-indulgent than many of the tracks on Power Trip.

BEN MACNAIR



DION

GIRL FRIENDS



Keeping The Blues Alive

This is the third Dion album to feature a great array of guest musicians released over the last four years, this time as the title suggests an all-ladies guest list. Again, Dion has written all original new songs and matched them up perfectly to his gifted co-stars. The album kicks off with a real tour de force with Soul Force, classic rhythmic vocals from Dion giving us a blues bragging house rocker fuelled by Susan Tedeschi playing off the scale, I thought I could dazzle by distraction sings Dion, I think he might, wonderful stuff. On, I Aim To Please we have Danielle Nicole pushing Dion all the way with some soaring vocals as they duet their way through this foot stomper. Valerie Tyson gives us a beautiful gospel feel on the opening of Stop Drop And Roll. She certainly has an Arethra sensibility to her vocals that draws you into the warmth she exudes. We get a straight blues next with Do Ladies Get The Blues, as well as Christine Ohlman on vocals we get some sublime guitar work courtesy of Debbie Davis. The harmonies are spot on and the whole thing swings and shuffles in all the right places. Dion has a lot of fun in his song writing but he can get serious too, An American Hero is a rallying call full of patriotism and aspiration for a better future. The brilliant Carlene

> “making the absolute best music of his life

Carter was the perfect choice to accompany him on this, adding a plaintive feel to proceedings. One of the album highlights is the sexy duet with Rory Block, the hard edged Don't You Want A Man Like Me. Some super back and forth vocals interspersed with super harmonies. The fun in the studio seeped into the grooves. Sugar Daddy is pure fun, Dion having a gentle dig at dating apps telling his potential girlfriend that he's strictly old school but still got it. Christine Ohlman again sharing the vocals. Endless Highway is a road song that reflects life's journey too, and Dion is joined by the virtuoso violinist Randi Fishenfeld who gives a gorgeous country rock vibe to the whole thing as it rolls along. The duet with Maggie Rose is super, she is a great vocalist with a distinctive style and the song is a clever reverse love song where the guy isn't the player trying to trick the woman into an affair but rather the other way around. It works really well and highlights what a good writer Dion is. Hey Suzy, is a good time romp that is maybe inspired by Dion's long time partner of the same name. Fitting to have another Suzy, Sue Foley guesting on it, and between them they do it justice with some spot-on perfect harmonies. Blues royalty Shemakia Copeland lends her prowess to Mama Said, a good fun duet. We end the show with a rocker, Just Like That featuring blues rock guitarist Joanne Shaw Taylor perfectly showcasing the rhythmic vocal style Dion is famous for. This is another consistently high standard album that sits perfectly with Blues With Frends and Stomping Ground and belies the fact that Dion had his first hit back in 1957 but is now making the absolute best music of his life.

STEVE YOURGLIVCH

IBBA TOP 40

INDEPENDENT BLUES
BROADCASTERS ASSOCIATION

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POSITION	ARTIST	ALBUM
1	BERNIE MARSDEN	WORKING MAN
2	SAVERIO MACCNE	SOUTHERN LIGHT
3	B'EE	WHAT'S IT GONNA B'EE
4	DAVE FERRA	MEET ME DOWN THE ALLEY
5	MIKE ZITO & ALBERT CASTIGLIA	BLOOD BROTHERS - LIVE IN CANADA
6	MITCH GRAINGER	PLUG IT IN
7	DOM MARTIN	BURIED IN THE HAIL
8	KENNY WAYNE SHEPHERD	DIRT ON MY DIAMONDS VOL. 1
9	SPOONFUL OF BLUES	SONGS FROM NOTODDEN NORWAY
10	FOGHAT	SONIC MOJO
11	HEAVENLY CREAM	AN ACOUSTIC TRIBUTE TO CREAM
12	CEDAR COUNTY COBRAS	HOMESICK BLUES
13	THE PAUL COOK BLUES BAND FEAT. KATIE BRADLEY	I SPY
14	THE CASH BOX KINGS	OSCAR'S MOTEL
15	ELLES BAILEY	THE NIGHT OWL & THE LARK (E.P.)
16	REDFISH BLUES BAND	TOGETHER IS BETTER
17	FOG BLUES & BRASS BAND	TWELVE BAR PRESCRIPTION EP
18	JO HARMAN	3 HEARTS LIVE
19	KATMANDU BLUES BAND	BIG IN NEPAL
20	KIRRIS RIVIERE & THE DELTA DU BRUIT	KIRRIS RIVIERE & THE DELTA DU BRUIT
21	THE ROADHOUSE BLUES BAND	LONG TIME COMING
22	THE BLACKBURN BROTHERS	SOULFUNKN'BLUES
23	11 GUYS QUARTET	11 X 11
24	LONG ROAD HOME	ARE WE INVISIBLE?
25	TOM HAMBRIDGE	BLU JA VU
26	SUE FOLEY	LIVE IN AUSTIN VOL. 1
27	EMMA WILSON	MEMPHIS CALLING
28	BISON HIP	OLDER STRONGER BETTER
29	BOB CORRITORE & FRIENDS	PHOENIX BLUES RUMBLE
30	CHRIS O'LEARY	THE HARD LINE
31	CATFISH KEITH	WILD OX MOAN
32	JOE BONAMASSA	BLUES DELUXE VOL. 2
33	CHRISTONE 'KINGFISH' INGRAM	LIVE IN LONDON
34	TINSLEY ELLIS	NAKED TRUTH
35	TINY LEGS TIM	SING MY TITLE
36	RED RED	THE ALABAMA KID
37	THOMAS HEPPELL	THOMAS HEPPELL
38	LARKIN POE	BLOOD HARMONY
39	GRÁINNE DUFFY	DIRT WOMAN BLUES
40	JIMMY REGAL & THE ROYALS	FIRST & LAST STOP

IBBA

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CATFISH KEITH

WILD OX MOAN

SPOONFUL OF BLUES

SONGS FROM NOTODDEN NORWAY

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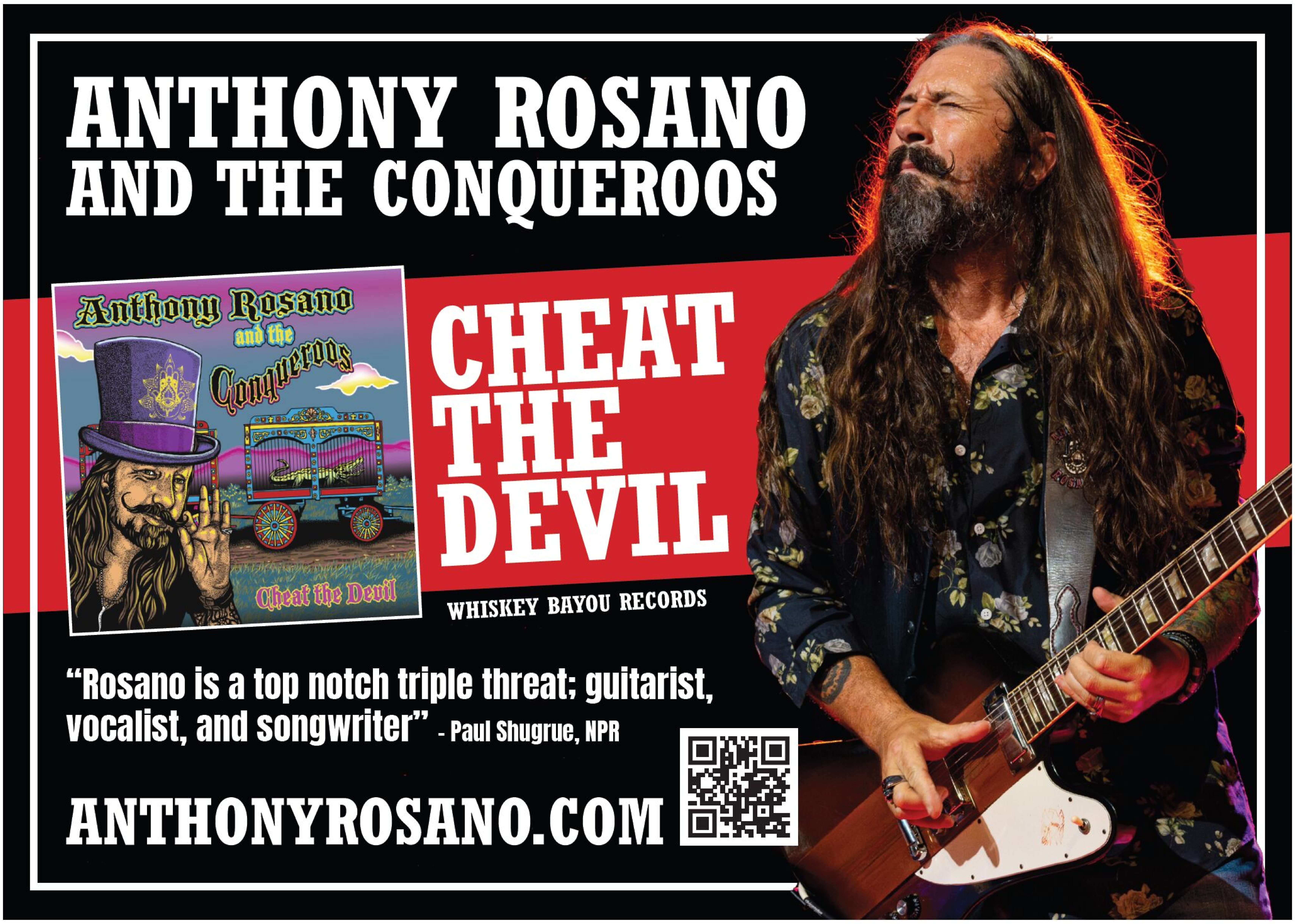
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